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Approved For Release 2002/11/04 : CIA-RDP80-00630A000300040001-3

INTELLIGENCE MONOGRAPH

NATIONAL ESTIMATES: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRODUCT AND THE PROCESS



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

APRIL 1977

TR/IM 77-03

Approved For Release 2002/11/04 : CIA-RDP80-00630A000300040001-3

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PREFACE

The impetus for this study derived mainly from two factors. First the intelligence community had never taken a comprehensive look at the role of national intelligence estimates in the decision-making processes of government. Secondly, estimates have been increasingly subject to criticism in recent years, and a serious effort to evaluate them seemed in order. Consequently, a study team composed of experienced Agency officers was assembled and work begun in July 1976, under the auspices¹ of CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence.

The intelligence community produces a wide variety of products which make judgments about the future, ranging from crisis reports and short-term analytical articles through National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and similar interagency products. The study deals only with the last of these, i.e., interagency papers produced by National Intelligence Officers

¹ The team was composed of [] member of the former Board of National Estimates and a National Intelligence Officer (Ret.); [] of the former Office of Current Intelligence, Directorate of Intelligence, and presently Director of the Center for the Study of Intelligence in the Office of Training; [] of the Directorate of Operations, who served with the Office of National Estimates in its early years and recently completed a tour on the National Security Council Staff; and [] of the former Office of Current Intelligence, now assigned to the Current Reporting Group, Directorate of Intelligence.

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(NIOs) on behalf of the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) (although some findings of the study may be germane to other products). Included are NIEs and Special NIEs, now produced in considerably fewer numbers than in former years. Also included are National Intelligence Analytical Memoranda (NIAM) and Interagency Intelligence Memoranda (IIM), which have existed only since 1973. The NIAM, infrequently used, is lengthier and more detailed than the typical NIE. The IIM is produced under the aegis of the DCI, but is not passed upon by the National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB) and is a less formal and more flexible publication than the NIE.

The study methodology adopted placed considerable emphasis on conducting interviews with a wide range of users and producers of estimates.² Valuable supplemental and background information was acquired from existing classified and unclassified literature about estimates and from published estimates. Devising a methodology for evaluating estimates themselves proved impracticable, for the reasons given in Appendix A. Appendix A also contains a fuller explanation of the methodology used in the study, as well as information on the 66 interviews conducted by the study team. A selective bibliography is included as Appendix B.

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It is important to remember that the interviews were conducted prior to the change in Administration which occurred in January 1977 and that the comments apply to the intelligence and policy processes which existed at that time.

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It did not prove easy to generalize about the responses of those interviewed. Time did not permit us to cover all the issues with each of the individuals interviewed. The responses covered a wide spectrum, and the respondents did not fall neatly into categories; typically, reactions to estimates were mixed. It was also necessary to allow for personal differences, e.g., essentially the same view might be expressed by one person in low key and by another with vigor and passion, or differences in view might be disguised by subtleties of language. Further, a study of this kind tends to invite a critical approach, as does the asking of questions in an interview situation. Efforts were made to guard against these and similar hazards, and to concentrate in the report on certain recurring themes which rather clearly emerged from the interviews.

The report covers three broad topics: the product and its audience, the process of producing estimates, and the relationship between producer and user. The first topic is considered in Chapter II, which sets forth the views of users concerning the quality and utility of estimates, and contrasts these views with the traditional perception of the role and function of estimates. This chapter takes up two other matters: what estimates should attempt to do for the reader, and for whom they should be prepared. The estimative process is discussed in Chapters III and IV. Chapter III discusses certain specific aspects of the production process, such as methods of presentation and the coordination process.

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Chapter IV covers the question of the organization for producing estimates. The relationship between producers and users is taken up in Chapter V, which discusses, inter alia, the benefits and risks of close association, and the means by which the needs of users can be conveyed to producers of estimates. The final chapter has some thoughts on the future of estimates.

Gratitude is tendered to the many people who agreed to be interviewed and who so generously contributed time and thought to this study. It could not have been prepared without them.

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SUMMARY

I. SETTING THE STAGE (pp. 19-22)

National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) have changed over the years from short, narrowly focused papers dealing with near-term problems to include more comprehensive, analytical studies of longer-range issues. This change resulted from:

- greater analytical capabilities;
- an enlarged data base; and,
- changing requirements, as readers grew more numerous, more sophisticated, and more demanding.

The role and importance of estimates in policy making has varied with Administrations, particularly in response to:

- the structure of the policy making machinery and the place accorded estimates;
- the attitude of top policy makers toward intelligence; and,
- the quality and relevance of estimates as perceived by the principal users.

Reaching their zenith in the early 1960's, estimates subsequently declined in prestige and drew increasingly sharp criticism. The criticism contributed to the decision of the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in 1973 to abolish the Board and Office of National Estimates (ONE) and entrust the preparation of estimates to a group of National Intelligence Officers (NIOs).

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II. ESTIMATES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLICY SUPPORT (pp. 23-50)

The criticism of estimates has continued since the change, however, and this chapter sets forth the views of policy makers and other consumers on the present quality and utility of estimates and comments on how and for whom they should be written.

The Traditional Doctrine (pp. 23-24)

National estimates were intended at their outset to be the most authoritative appraisals available to the top levels of government on foreign developments of national security concern. Issued by the DCI, they were to be forward looking and predictive, rather than historical and descriptive, of high quality and objectivity, and national products with respect to subject matter, audience, and process of production. The interviews for this study were conducted with this doctrine in mind and the results were measured against it.

How Estimates Fared (pp. 25-34)

Against the traditional standard, estimates did not fare well. Although highly praised by some users, and found useful in one way or another by most others, they were judged in the aggregate to fall well short of the traditional ideal. They clearly have not played the important role envisioned for them in the national security decision process.

The Negative Side (pp. 25-28). Estimates seldom reach the top levels of their intended audience--the President and members of the National Security Council (NSC). Such of their

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content as does is usually included in memoranda or briefings prepared at lower levels, where estimates are widely received, and read to varying degrees. The complaints about estimates focused on quality and relevance; estimates were criticized for being:

- irrelevant to, or oblivious of, the specific policy problems of the readers;
- insufficiently analytical and overly descriptive;
- conservative and imprecise in their judgments about the future;
- inadequate in explaining judgments and conclusions, and in discussing the alternatives considered and discarded; and,
- unable to contribute much that is unique or not already known to the policy maker, particularly on political subjects.

The Positive Side (pp.28-30). Some respondents were high in their praise of estimates and others were on the whole well satisfied with them; almost all found them useful in one way or another. For example:

- those with strongly positive views, including two former cabinet members, tended to be less concerned about the relevance of estimates to immediate policy issues, and valued them for their presentation of a disinterested view;
- others with a positive view expected less of estimates, and were not troubled by the deficiencies perceived by the more critical;
- most users valued estimates for their balance and professionalism, because they pulled together all that was known about a subject, and because they helped assure the reader that he had considered all the factors bearing on a problem.

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Other Findings (pp. 30-34). Estimates got good marks for objectivity--some users considered this one of their principal virtues. Most users who said they had observed bias, considered it a comparatively minor problem, easily discerned and adjusted to, and the consequence of human imperfection rather than of deliberate intent.

It proved difficult to get the views of users on differences in the quality and utility of estimates since the 1973 change in the production system, because of the turnover of officers in policy positions. There was, however, a fair degree of consensus between users and producers on two points:

- the NIO system has produced a modest improvement in the relevance of estimates and somewhat greater improvement in the responsiveness of the system; but,
- estimates are more uneven in quality than those produced before 1973, because of the new drafting procedures.

The interviews revealed different reactions to different kinds of estimates:

- those on military, scientific, technical and economic subjects were better received than those on political subjects, not because of differences in quality, but because most users were less able to handle the complex data, perform their own analysis, and reach their own conclusions.

We found little or no support for criticism heard in recent years concerning:

- the proliferation of intelligence publications containing estimates;

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- the issuance of departmental as well as national estimates; or,
- the absence of an explicit scale of probabilities in estimates.

Why the Gap? (pp. 34-40)

The substantial disparity between traditional expectations and what users said is attributable in large part to deficiencies in the product:

- the failure to be fully responsive to the policy question;
- the failure to be sufficiently venturesome; and,
- inadequacies in drawing implications for U.S. policy.

Some Unrealized Assumptions (pp. 35-38). There are other reasons for the disparity, which individually and collectively are of considerable importance. A basic one is that the traditional doctrine puts an unrealistic burden on the DCI and the intelligence community. It rests on some unstated and unrealized assumptions.

One is that estimates would have a major influence on the formulation of national security policy:

- in fact, estimates have played only a modest role, partly because
- security policy is not directly driven by facts, analyses and resulting judgments; it is the complex product of an often lengthy and untidy process, in which many other considerations come into play.

A second assumption is that policy makers would seek and welcome the contributions of estimative intelligence, even when they cast doubt on current policy:

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- in fact, policy makers often believe that they can estimate as well as the intelligence specialist, if not better; also,
- estimates may say unwelcome things and cast those who produce them in the role of troublemakers.

A third assumption is that the relationship between policy and intelligence would be close, and communication free and complete:

- this relationship has usually not existed; it has been very weak in recent years; moreover,
- there is an absence of structure for systematically insuring that estimates are part of the policy process.

Other Reasons (pp. 38-40). Two other circumstances have contributed to the failure of estimates to play their prescribed role. One is that the foreign policy establishment tends to be highly operational, and to focus on the short term and highly specific matters immediately before it. However:

- estimates were originally intended not merely to support day-to-day operations, but as contributions to the formulation of basic, long-term national security policy;
- from this perspective, the difficulty may be with the way policy is formulated. Government institutions, such as State's Policy Planning Staff, which were designed to assist with long range policy, usually focus instead on short term issues.

Secondly there has been suspicion and distrust of estimates at the top, and this has had serious effects on their use.

- Unless estimates are welcomed and read at the top, they are not likely to be taken seriously elsewhere.

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The Market for Estimates (pp. 40-50)

Even the most critical users believe that estimates have a role to play in the policy process.

What Should Estimates Do? (pp. 42-46). Users believe that estimates should:

- identify policy problems not yet in the forefront, and pose questions about them;
- sort out the facts in complicated situations where such facts are elusive, apparently contradictory or fast changing;
- identify and evaluate the forces at work and their interplay, and discuss how their continuation or manipulation could affect the final outcome;
- judge the consequences of ongoing developments for U.S. policy; and,
- judge foreign reactions to U.S. policies, present or contemplated.

There was a relative lack of interest in specific predictions of future events such as coups, elections, or changes of government.

Most striking about these comments is their reaffirmation of the traditional doctrine, with its emphasis on the analysis of forces, trends and their implications for the U.S. in a context analytical and forward looking, rather than descriptive and current.

For Whom Should Estimates Be Written? (pp. 46-48). The nature of the audience is important, for it affects the way

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estimates are organized, their level of detail and how they present facts, analyses and conclusions.

Some of those interviewed thought that estimates should be written with readers at the very top in mind--the President, the NSC, and other cabinet members--not because estimates would regularly be read there, but because so aimed, they would catch other readers along the way.

--But the perspectives and needs of those at the top are not necessarily the same as those of the individuals who support them.

--Some estimates will be read at the top, particularly those that the DCI believes should be read there, and which he urges upon the senior policy makers.

Most respondents believed that estimates should be aimed at the Assistant Secretary of State, White House Staff or comparable level, and we agree.

--These are the officials who set the terms for the policy debate by formulating the options and alternatives, who enjoy the confidence of policy makers at the highest levels, and who constitute the highest level combining expertise and the power to act on many problems.

How Should Estimates Be Written? (pp. 48-50). Such readers are able and knowledgeable, have access to the same material as estimators, and feel competent to reach judgments on the basis of their own analysis. If estimates are to appeal to this audience they must:

--emphasize analysis rather than description, show the relationships among data, analysis and conclusions, and describe the thought process by which the estimators came to their judgments;

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- explain what issues were contentious and what was disregarded and why, and set forth any differences of opinion;
- describe continuity and change as compared with previous estimates, and identify earlier material now judged incorrect; and,
- clearly state the implications of their analysis and conclusions for U.S. policy.

III. IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS FOR NATIONAL ESTIMATES (pp. 51-79)

This chapter discusses the views of producers, some users, and the study team on aspects of the process by which estimates are produced.

Self-Initiated Estimates (pp. 51-52)

About half of all national estimates are initiated by the intelligence community and most producers and users who commented on the subject found this satisfactory. A very few felt strongly that, to avoid irrelevant papers, estimates should be produced only on request, but the majority and the study team believe that producers have a duty to initiate an estimate when they perceive a development of significance for U.S. policy.

Terms of Reference (pp. 52-54)

The degree to which users participate in preparing the terms of reference is likely to determine the real relevance of an estimate to the needs and interests of its main recipients. A formalized procedure providing for such consultation

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should be instituted. The risk of predetermining the outcome by a conscious or unconscious "loading" of the questions appears minimal and manageable.

Multidisciplinary Work (pp. 54-57)

Users and producers alike agreed on the need for more cross-disciplinary or analytically-integrated estimates, and on the difficulty of doing them. A common complaint was that readers were left to synthesize separate sections on political, economic, military and other subjects. Bureaucratic separation and increasing specialization among analysts were cited as the causes for this situation. There is, however, little agreement on how best to accomplish good multidisciplinary synthesis. At a minimum, it probably requires bringing various analysts together under an effective project leader for wide-ranging "synthesizing discussion" before drafting begins.

New Analytical Methodologies (pp. 57-59)

Although some critics fault the estimative process for not incorporating more quantitative, mathematical, and systems-oriented methodologies, we found little support for this charge. There was a great deal of skepticism about the use of computers and other new tools, and producers saw some risks in the use of new methodologies. Nonetheless, it is important to keep up with the state of the art, and some new techniques appear to have at least limited applicability.

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Competing Analysis (pp. 59-63)

Another concept that has received attention recently is the creation of "competing centers of analysis." The only extensive effort to provide an alternative analytical approach was the widely-publicized and controversial "B-team" experiment. Undertaken last year during the preparation of the annual estimate on Soviet strategic forces, it involved a team of experts from outside the intelligence community. There are many practical problems in such an effort, however, and the best insurance of proper analytic competition probably lies in the skill, perception, objectivity, and intellectual rigor of the estimative manager rather than in any organizational technique.

Net Assessments (pp. 63-66)

Net assessments involving the U.S. require access to data on U.S. forces, weapons and capabilities. Those interviewed agreed fully that the intelligence community should neither conduct them nor include them in estimates, because of the inordinate risk of transforming estimators into advocates or opponents of particular U.S. weapons systems or policies. Net assessments comparing the capabilities of two or more foreign countries are an acceptable and at times essential part of national estimates, and there is need for more of them.

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Coordination (pp. 66-70)

This process brings together experts from the various agencies to debate and revise the text of a draft estimate. Coordination is central to the concept of national intelligence, allowing the DCI as the nation's chief intelligence officer to set forth his views while requiring other participants either to agree or to express and explain their disagreements. Substantively, coordination brings the talents of the entire intelligence community to bear, makes coverage of the pertinent issues more likely, and, at its best, helps to define and sharpen issues.

The best way to avoid the pitfalls of coordination, such as masking divisions and fuzzing conclusions, is to select a chairman for coordination meetings who is tough-minded, independent, judicious and skilled in running a meeting, and to remember that consensus is often not what users want or need.

Dissent, Summaries and Classification (pp. 70-74)

Consumers welcome the presentation of conflicting views on controversial and complex matters, and they are sufficiently sophisticated to distinguish between dissents reflecting substantive differences and those taken primarily to support bureaucratic positions. The present trend of incorporating dissents in the text of estimates, rather than in footnotes, is clearly favored by users, some of whom want also to see an elaboration of the rationale behind a dissent.

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Consumers emphasized that a tightly written and accurate summation of the key conclusions is the best possible device for ensuring high-level attention to the message of an estimate. Many did not object to lengthy estimates so long as they led off with a crisp, well-written summary. The importance of a good summary can hardly be overemphasized.

Policy makers strongly favored the lowest possible security classification for estimates as a means of widening their audience and enhancing their utility. Where possible, highly classified material seems best handled in separate, more restrictively distributed annexes, so that a lower classification can be given to the basic estimate.

Presentation, "Post-Mortems" and Updates (pp. 74-79)

While recognizing that both written papers and oral briefings have certain advantages, almost all consumers commenting on the two methods clearly preferred to get most if not all estimative material in written form. The bulk of any effort to improve presentational formats ought therefore to go into making written estimates as succinct, readable, and responsive to different levels of need as possible.

Post-mortems can be useful if done sparingly, and if they include feedback from consumers.

There was almost no support from consumers for a regularly scheduled revision and update of estimates, except for the annual Soviet strategic estimate, NIE 11-3/8. In our view, estimates should be updated only when significant changes have occurred.

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IV. ORGANIZATION FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ESTIMATES (pp. 80-91)

The current system for producing estimates gives each NIO a larger amount of authority and responsibility than any one individual had under the previous system, and it encourages and requires a close working relationship between the NIO and the main producers and users in his area.

Both of these results were highly valued by most of the users who commented on the subject. Some of those interviewed, however, felt that the present system places too heavy a burden on the NIO, and that it suffers by lack of provision for collegial review, as once supplied by the Board of National Estimates.

One benefit of the present system, in the eyes of some producers, is that it puts the drafting responsibility on analysts who deal with a subject on a day-to-day basis. Others believed, however, that the analysts' lack of experience in estimative writing and the conflicting demands on their time from other tasks often resulted in a lower quality estimative product.

Changes in Current Practices (pp. 89-91)

Efforts have been made to respond to some of the criticisms, including the authorization of a panel of outside consultants to review estimative drafts. Without offering a detailed blueprint, the study team believes that additional steps should be taken. These are:

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- to establish a body of generalists to serve as an internal collegial review group;
- to establish a small group of analysts to do the initial drafting of estimates as a full time task; and,
- to activate the authorized panel of outside consultants.

These steps would help insure high quality and the thorough and complete treatment of a subject. They would provide an additional means of getting objective and disinterested national estimates, and would highlight the primacy of the DCI. They should not be allowed to impinge on a strong virtue of the present system: its improved ability to maintain contact with the consumer and to insure the pertinence and responsiveness of the estimative product to the consumer's needs.

V. THE USER'S ROLE IN ESTIMATES (pp. 92-102)

If estimates are to be useful and relevant, producers must clearly understand the needs of users. Such understanding can best be acquired by direct communication on matters of scope, timing and the issues to be addressed. An effective dialogue between producers and users would seem to require:

- clear evidence of interest by the President and senior policy makers in the use of estimates;
- a recognized procedure for fitting estimates into the national security decision process; and,

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--active participation by senior policy and intelligence officials.

To date, these conditions have been met only partially and sporadically. The National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) was set up in 1971 to provide guidance by users on their needs and to evaluate intelligence products, but proved ineffective. Since it was abolished in 1976, there has been no formal mechanism for user-producer exchange. Despite what the NIOs have done to bridge the gap, intelligence production and collection are still determined more by what the producers think is needed than by direct requests or by guidance from users.

Some believe that intelligence analysts should maintain a certain remoteness from decision makers to keep intelligence untainted by policy pressures. But most users and producers took a different view, considering a close relationship mandatory--its primary benefit being a clearer, more realistic appreciation by each of the other's capabilities, limitations and needs.

Providing for Closer Contacts (pp. 97-102)

The major obstacles to closer user-producer relations are lack of time, physical separation, and a view among some policy makers that the producers of intelligence are well enough informed and sufficiently competent to determine on their own what users want and need. Most users agreed, however, that efforts to improve communication are desirable.

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- One solution sometimes suggested is the creation of a forum such as the NSCIC, but without its liabilities. This course is worth trying, but not a great deal should be expected of it.

It is quite clear that the improvement of communication will depend mostly on the efforts of individuals, and that the main burden will remain on the producer.

- Several policy makers stressed the importance of developing personal relationships of mutual confidence with intelligence producers;
- Users should do all they can to insure that the producer is aware of trends in policy and to understand what estimates can and cannot do; producers must help them acquire this understanding and absorb what is readily knowable about policy concerns;
- More tours for selected intelligence officers in policy offices would be helpful.

VI. THE FUTURE ROLE OF ESTIMATES (pp. 103-107)

As its power and self-sufficiency become more circumscribed, the U.S. will be increasingly dependent on accurate estimates of the possible plans and actions of its adversaries and friends. Thus, estimates will have a highly useful role for the foreseeable future and should get high priority in the overall intelligence effort.

Estimates will be more difficult to prepare in the future. With the growing complexity and interrelatedness of the world's military, technological, economic, political and social affairs, it will be harder to understand and to

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foresee crucial developments, to be clear and precise, and to phrase estimative judgments in simple declarative sentences. The likely shrinking of intelligence resources will be coupled with a requirement for estimates on a wider variety of subjects aimed at more and different consumers, including Congress and perhaps even the public.

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I

SETTING THE STAGE

National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) are almost as old as "central intelligence" itself, having been systematically³ produced by the United States Government since 1950. In October of that year, General W. Bedell Smith became Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) and established an Office of National Estimates (ONE), together with a nine-man Board of National Estimates under [REDACTED] University.

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In the early years, estimates tended to be short, spare, narrowly focused, and concerned with events in a very short time frame. NIE #1, written in November, 1950, was entitled Prospect for Communist Armed Action in the Philippines During November. Others written in the first year or two were very cautious about looking more than a month or two ahead. Estimative judgments were often tendered with little of the underlying rationale provided in the text.

³

Probably the first "national estimate" was prepared under the direction of Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter as DCI in March 1948. Its subject was Soviet intentions in the Berlin crisis, and its production was a milestone in interdepartmental cooperation and a forerunner of the system adopted in 1950. See "March Crisis 1948, Act I," by [REDACTED] in Studies in Intelligence, Vol. X, No. 4 (Fall 1966), p. 13.

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As analytical capabilities and the data base grew, estimates also changed. Greater emphasis was placed on the presentation of data and on the development of the argument. The forces at work in a situation were discussed and trends identified and evaluated. Estimates were produced whose objective was to educate and to provide background.

These changes were stimulated in considerable part by changes on the demand side. From the beginning, the market for estimates went well beyond the top policy makers and their senior aides, and it grew greatly with the passage of time. It came to include readers with widely varying backgrounds and requirements. Many of them required sophisticated analysis, and became increasingly unwilling to accept the judgments of others without a backdrop of fact, argumentation and analysis.

In this respect, a major turning point occurred with the advent of the Nixon administration in 1969. Skeptical from the first about the estimative product, its senior officials demanded a complete justification of the judgments rendered, particularly for military estimates. They also required that sufficient data and analysis be presented so that the reader could reach his own conclusions from the material presented.

Estimates had their clearest formal role in the decision-making process during the Eisenhower administration, when the National Security Council (NSC) was a more structured and

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important policy making body than at any time before or since. The NSC Planning Board was the place where NIEs were brought together with policy inputs and combined for use by the NSC. Not every NIE had an impact on policy, but there were clearly defined institutional linkages connecting intelligence with the policy process. The potential of those arrangements was not fully realized, however. Estimates were not consistently read by high-level officials, and there is not much evidence that they had a major influence on policy.

With the decline in the role of the NSC machinery under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the systematic structured connection of estimates to policy was reduced. Nonetheless, the true heyday of estimates may have been in the early 1960s. It was then that the White House and important Cabinet members asked for and used more estimates in formulating policy than at any other time. The DCI and senior intelligence officers had access to the President and other top policy officials, and the DCI personally played a crucial role in inserting estimative products into the policy process. Also, at about that time rapidly expanding technical collection capabilities began to pay rich dividends, which were reflected in more comprehensive and sophisticated estimates, especially on technical and military subjects.

The influence and importance of estimates began a decline in the mid-1960s. Complaints about shortcomings in estimates

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have been voiced with increasing frequency, particularly since 1969. Although the themes had been heard in one form or another from the very beginning, the complaints built to a crescendo in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There appear to be a number of reasons, including internal governmental strains and divisions over Vietnam, a lack of access and influence with the White House by the DCI, and a belief by consumers that estimates were increasingly out of touch with the needs of the executive.

Partly in response to these complaints, DCI William Colby abolished ONE and the Board of National Estimates in November 1973, and established the system currently in effect. Overall responsibility for producing policy-relevant estimates, and for maintaining close contacts with producers and consumers of intelligence, was vested in some dozen senior National Intelligence Officers (NIOs), who reported to the DCI and were responsible for particular geographic regions or substantive specialties. The actual drafting of estimates was diffused: NIOs could call on intelligence production components anywhere in the community to furnish drafters, but in practice most drafting of non-specialized estimates fell to officers in CIA's Directorate of Intelligence.

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II

ESTIMATES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLICY SUPPORT

In setting about to study the role of estimates and in evaluating their success in supporting policy, it is first necessary to understand the extant doctrine of estimates--that amalgam of directives, pronouncements, and history which describes what estimates are supposed to be and do, and for whom they are supposed to be written. This chapter begins with that task. It follows with a discussion of what consumers say about their use of estimates and the value they place on them in order to see what differences exist between doctrine and fact.

The Traditional Doctrine

Part of the traditional perception of the role of estimates resides in the word itself. As distinct from reports and studies, estimates were to be forward-looking rather than historical and descriptive. Their ultimate purpose was to make judgments about the shape of the future on matters of concern to U.S. policy--that is, to estimate.

National estimates were intended to have a position of primacy among the various intelligence products prepared for decision makers. Estimates were to be the best and most authoritative appraisals available on subjects of national

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security concern. As such, they were to be national products in three senses: their subject matter was to be suitable for assisting in the formulation of national security policy; their audience was to be at the top levels of government-- including the President, members of the NSC, and similar officials; and the process of producing them was to engage the entire intelligence community, so that its combined knowledge could be brought to bear. Nonetheless, the estimate was to remain the product of the DCI, who was charged by statute with the production of national intelligence. Other participants in the process could disagree with the DCI, could attempt to persuade him to change his mind, and could express their dissents in the estimate itself, but they could not impose their views on him, or put him in the position of being a dissenter from the majority view.

The process was intended to achieve two other results. The first was quality sufficiently high to engage the most senior policy makers and to illumine their concerns. The second was objectivity and disinterestedness. This was to be achieved, in the first instance, by involving the entire community, rather than any single agency, in the production of an estimate. Beyond this, as the DCI's estimate, it was separated from the purview of intelligence agencies whose parent organizations had policy responsibilities, and assigned to an individual who did not, and whose responsibilities were to the NSC and to the President.

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How Estimates Fared

Against these standards, estimates did not fare well in the view of the users interviewed. Estimates were often found wanting in quality and in relevance to the concerns of the policy maker, and they did not play the role that had been envisaged for them in the formulation of policy. Although some individuals were high in their praise, and others found estimates useful in one or another respect or in particular situations, most users had critical remarks to make. In the aggregate, the quality and utility of estimates were viewed as falling well short of the traditional ideal.

The Negative Side. The first thing to be said is that most estimates do not reach their intended audience. If they are called to the attention of the President and NSC members, it is usually through memoranda written by subordinates who paraphrase the contents and add comments of their own. Sometimes marked or annotated copies are sent along. Below this level, estimates are widely received and frequently read. Even here, however, their content is often absorbed indirectly, through briefings, conversations, and memoranda.

As to the quality and utility of estimates, perhaps the most fundamental complaint was that they were not tied into the ongoing concerns of the policy maker. They were frequently criticized as irrelevant, and for showing unawareness of the specific policy problems facing the reader. As one respondent

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put it, the producers of estimates doubtless wanted to make them relevant, but apparently did not know how to go about it. Another complained that on the big foreign policy issues, estimates very often overlooked some of his problems and did not hit on his operational needs.

Such critics viewed estimates as documents which supplied general background and little more. For the most part, they placed little value on such background and could often not spare the time to read estimates. As one user put it, a lot of estimates wound up in his Saturday reading file, and were never read. Another allowed that estimates did perform an educational function for staff people, but he also said that they were never a guide to action.

Estimates were frequently criticized for being insufficiently analytical and overly descriptive. Many thought them lacking in boldness, and as more concerned with the comfortable present than with the unknown future. There were complaints about the "fuzziness" of their judgments about the future. One respondent said that many of the papers he got were "conservative"; the analysis was not taken very far, implications were not drawn, and there was a fear of making predictions.

Skepticism was also expressed about the quality and usefulness of the predictions that were made. Many readers were simply unwilling to accept a "faceless" bureaucratic

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product whose authors and their capabilities were unknown to them. They stressed the importance of the personal element in receiving and accepting advice, and of knowing something about the cast of mind and the thought processes of those who proffered it. They felt that a written product would inevitably fare poorly in competition with aides and confidantes, unless it was skillfully laid out and of exceptional quality.

Estimates were also faulted for insufficiently explaining their judgments and conclusions, and for not discussing what alternatives were considered and why they were rejected. Consequently, readers often felt that they were being asked to accept conclusions from "on high." Unpersuaded by analysis and argumentation, and lacking personal knowledge of the authors, many were unwilling to do so.

Skepticism was fed by a widespread belief that estimative products contributed little that was unique in making judgments about the future. Most policy makers--even the very senior--read considerable quantities of raw traffic, and consider themselves well informed. Many felt that they were in as good a position as the intelligence specialist to make estimates, and frequently in a better one, because of their greater first-hand knowledge of particular countries and leaders. This belief was far stronger on political subjects than on subjects of a scientific, economic or military nature.

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Past errors also played a role. Some cited specific cases in which they felt that more accurate judgments could have been made, even given the hazards of estimating and the benefit of hindsight. Such remarks require careful interpretation, however. They concerned mainly the general impact of estimates (e.g., they were too bland or too reassuring), or inadequacies in the portrayal of broad forces, trends, and implications. There was a tolerance of failures to make accurate predictions of specific events, such as a change of government or the outcome of an election. Our respondents recognized that such predictions are difficult, and were disposed to forgive failures, providing the basic analysis had been sound, and pertinent factors had been considered and illuminated. Indeed, a sizeable number of our respondents felt that specific predictions of specific events should not even be attempted.

The Positive Side. Some respondents took a strongly positive view of estimates and the estimative process, and advanced few or none of the criticisms set forth above. In effect, they felt that estimates met most if not all of the desiderata of the traditional doctrine. On the whole, they were less concerned than others about direct relevance to immediate policy issues, less operationally oriented, more interested in the "big picture," and more receptive to material which educated or provided background. They placed

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greater value, as one put it, on getting a "tapestry," and on the usefulness of an informed and disinterested view from outside the policy process.

Two of the three former cabinet members we interviewed fell into this category. One described the role of estimates in supporting policy as fundamental, and valued them for their objectivity and professionalism. The other said that estimates helped the policy maker to go through a mental checklist of what he should consider before making an important decision. He believed that they gave the policy officer a lot of information that he could tuck away and summon when he needed it most, and when he had the least time to acquire it.

The rest of those with a positive view fell into a different category. Not as sweeping or categorical in their praise as the group just discussed, neither were they troubled by the kinds of deficiencies perceived by the more critical. In a sense, they had more modest expectations for estimates, and these expectations were on the whole realized. For example, one senior military officer told us that estimates do pretty well in covering the subjects he is interested in and said that he is not too unhappy with the way things are, perhaps because he expects less than others. Another respondent said that he found estimates useful on specific occasions and in certain contexts, and the work objective and thorough.

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Many respondents found estimates useful because they pulled together in one place all that was known about a subject. This was meant in one or both of two senses. First, the estimate was perceived as a product which took into account all the available sources on a particular subject. Second, it was valued as the work of a body of experts from outside the policy process, who had given considerable thought to the subject. These qualities were found useful by many who faulted estimates on one or more of the grounds mentioned above.

In the same vein, estimates served for some as a kind of security blanket. That is, by providing a systematic and comprehensive treatment of facts, trends, and issues, they helped assure the reader that he had considered all the factors bearing on a problem. If an estimate confirmed his own analysis and conclusions, so much the better. It could then be used, if need be, to convince a skeptical superior or a doubting colleague. Indeed, some estimates were requested for the very purpose of persuading colleagues and superiors of the rightness of the requestor's views, and were used for that purpose.

Other Findings. During our interviews, we solicited views on the objectivity of estimates, and the presence or absence of bias. This is a matter of considerable importance, particularly in view of the virtues traditionally ascribed to the product and the process.

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On this score, estimates fared well. Indeed, a few respondents considered the objectivity of national estimates, and the fact that they were prepared outside the policy process, as among their principal virtues. Included, as noted, was a former cabinet member. Numerous others praised the balance and professionalism of the product. Some who did so had been critical of estimates on other grounds. For example, one individual observed that most of what he read was balanced and professional, even though these qualities led to what he called blandness and to a lack of focus on the issues which count.

Some of our respondents did say that they had observed bias in estimates, either currently or in the past. With two exceptions, however, they viewed this as a comparatively minor problem, rather easily discerned and adjusted to, and as the consequence of human imperfection rather than of deliberate intent. As one person put it, the record varies, everyone is a prisoner of his own stereotypes, but the intelligence community makes a reasonable effort. Another said that it was not possible to get totally away from subjectivity or from vested interests; he said that he did not currently see hidden policy biases, although he felt that vested interests had shown through in the past.

In only two cases did an alleged lack of objectivity bulk large in the comments of our respondents. In one case, a former

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senior official felt that estimates frequently and with intent superimposed viewpoints not derived from the facts, or allowed facts to be overruled by the conventional wisdom. In the other, our respondent in effect imputed bias to estimates because their conclusions did not agree with his, and, as far as we could tell, for that reason alone.

We attempted to get a sense of whether users of estimates perceived any differences in the quality and utility of estimates as the result of the change in the method of producing them made in 1973. This proved difficult, partly because of turnover at the policy making level and the unfamiliarity of many with the process and the product before 1973. There was, however, a fair degree of consensus on two points. The first was that the NIO system had produced modest improvement in the relevance of estimates and somewhat greater improvement in the flexibility and responsiveness of the system. Conversely, estimates were thought to be more uneven in quality than before 1973, a result which some attributed to the new procedures for drafting them.

The interviews revealed what appeared to be systematic differences in reactions to different kinds of estimates. The so-called "hard" estimates--those on military, scientific and technical, and economic subjects--tended to get a better reception than those on politics or foreign policy. This was apparently not a function of differences in intrinsic quality,

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but rather of differences in the policy maker's familiarity with the complex and difficult subject matter, his ability to do his own analysis, and to reach his own conclusions. Also, many judgments in military estimates are computational or represent the extrapolation of comparatively hard information. By comparison, judgments on political matters, or on intentions, seem fuzzier, less precise, and less supportable, and often are.

Another finding is advanced with caution. On the whole, there appeared to be more satisfaction with estimates at the country director or equivalent level than at higher levels. Caution is necessary because our sample at the country director level was small. We mention this matter only because the implications are considerable, and because it may warrant attention at some future time. Perhaps higher level policy makers need a product so sensitive to their particular concerns that it is virtually impossible for a producer many steps removed to satisfy them effectively, without new arrangements for exchanges on needs and capabilities. The country expert and the producer, by contrast, may more nearly share perspectives, as well as views on the evidence and the conclusions that can be drawn from it.

We failed to find among consumers certain concerns that criticisms of estimates in recent years had led us to expect. For example, consumers did not consider that they were getting confused signals as the result of the proliferation of intelligence

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publications that cross their desks, estimates among them. The existence of departmental as well as national estimates on some matters also did not seem to present a problem. In general, users seemed to appreciate getting a variety of viewpoints, so long as they were analytical and interpretive and not just a duplicate catalogue of facts or narrative description.

Similarly, there did not appear to be much concern with the present style of estimative writing, or with the lack of some explicit scale of probabilities. The use of traditional expressions such as "probably," "likely" and so forth seemed satisfactory, though they admittedly do not convey the same meaning to all readers. The experimental efforts to provide explicit quantitative rating scales for probability apparently have not struck any very responsive chord with users. They were never mentioned as examples to be emulated.

Why the Gap?

Why was there such a disparity between what estimates are supposed to be and do and what was said about them by those interviewed? The answer must begin with a mea culpa. Much of the problem lies with deficiencies in the product, and in the failure to provide the users of estimates with the kinds of product they believe they need.

Much of what was said above speaks for itself. It seems clear that estimates have frequently not understood the policy question, that they have been insufficiently venturesome, and

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that they have not done enough about discussing the implications of their analysis and conclusions for the U.S. and for U.S. policy. Estimating is a difficult and hazardous art, and the temptation to be descriptive and current, rather than analytical and forward looking, has not always been resisted.

The answer does not end with a mea culpa, however. There are a number of other circumstances which account for the failure of estimates to achieve the eminent position contemplated for them. Individually and collectively, these are of considerable importance; what is more, they explain in part why the quality of estimates has frequently left something to be desired.

Some Unrealized Assumptions. A basic difficulty is that the doctrine for estimates represents an ideal, which puts an unrealistic burden on the DCI and the intelligence community. Specifically, the doctrine rests on some unstated and unrealized assumptions, which have borne little resemblance to reality, and which should not have been expected to. These are:

- 1) that intelligence in general, and estimates in particular, would have a major influence on the formulation of national security policy, if not the major influence; 2) that policy makers would seek and welcome the contributions of estimative intelligence even when they cast doubts on current policy; and
- 3) that, consequently, the relationship between national policy

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and national intelligence would be close and intimate, and communication on capabilities and needs free and complete.

As to the first of these assumptions, national estimates have played only a modest role in the formulation of policy. Almost certainly, this was an inevitable development. National security policy is not directly driven by facts, analyses, and judgments, and knowledge does not lead to action in any simple way. What also come into play are competing bureaucratic pressures, a wide range of domestic considerations, the concepts, perceptions and stereotypes held by the policy makers themselves, and a host of essentially political inputs.

Policy making is a complex and often lengthy and untidy process. Many policy decisions--perhaps most of them--are not made at a particular time or place, as the result of a particular act, or as the product of a formalized, established process. Policy may emerge incrementally, or as the result of a series of specific decisions, no one of which appeared portentous at the time it was made. It may be generated by efforts to prepare a speech or a statement to the press. Under these circumstances, there are some real and difficult questions about how estimates are to impact on the policy process, and at what point.

Intellectually, the producers of national estimates have long recognized the limits of their role, as these limits have been borne upon them by experience. Yet, the older notion

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has been hard to shake, so firmly has it become part of the mythology.

As to the second assumption, it was overly optimistic to assume that policy makers would represent a ready and even eager market for estimates. As noted earlier, policy makers read raw intelligence traffic, consider themselves well informed, and often believe that they can do as well at estimating as the intelligence specialist, if not better. Moreover, because of the past accomplishments of intelligence itself, policy makers have access to a corpus of fact, analysis and judgment on national security issues from a national vantage point--a resource taken for granted now, but not available in earlier years. Further, they have access to a continuing stream of other analytic and estimative material, including departmental estimative products. Many users attach no special value to a coordinated, national product as compared with a departmental issuance, and some prefer the latter.

Additionally, if national estimates do their job, they may wear out their welcome. Thus, one of the functions of estimates is to help policy makers think about their problems and to address, and if necessary to challenge, their assumptions and judgments. In the process, an estimate may say things the policy maker does not wish to hear and which make life more difficult for him. On divisive issues, or where the political or budgetary stakes are high, producers of estimates can be

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cast in the role of interlopers and troublemakers, and they run the risk of being considered not on the team. Much depends, of course, on the attitudes existing on both sides, and on the presence or absence of mutual confidence and trust.

Finally, the idealized relationship involving free and frank interchange between producer and user does not exist, and events of the past few years made it less of a reality than it used to be. There is, moreover, a conspicuous absence of structure for systematically insuring that estimates are a part of the policy process, and that they can make whatever contributions their own virtues allow. The reference here is only in part to a formal bureaucratic mechanism; more fundamentally, it is to a concept of how estimative intelligence and policy are to complement one another, and how information on capabilities and needs is to be exchanged.

Other Reasons. The failure of estimates to play their prescribed role is in part the result of two other circumstances. First, the foreign policy establishment is, on the whole, highly operational. This means that it is concerned with the policy matters immediately before it and that these are often short term and highly specific in nature. Frequently, users judge an estimate by whether it meets such operational needs; if it does not, it is deemed irrelevant, and it remains unread, or is read and ignored. For example, one user complained

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that a paper on a country of interest to him had not established the relationship of what was said to certain issues then under negotiation with that country.

One solution, of course, is for the intelligence estimator to do the fast footwork required to inform himself of what is needed and to supply it. Under the NIO system (described in Chapter IV), attempts have been made, with some success, to get a better feel for the requirements of users and to devise more flexible and responsive estimative formats. The Inter-agency Intelligence Memorandum (IIM) is one such form. Typically, the IIM addresses matters of current concern to the contemplated users and it can be more quickly and easily coordinated than an NIE, because it does not require a formal sign-off by the various intelligence chiefs.

Although operational relevance is important, there is another aspect to the matter. Estimates have been visualized by those who produce them not merely as products which supported day-to-day operations, but as contributions to the formulation of basic, long term national security policy. They were to assist in developing concepts and in establishing broad, general directions for policy. Accordingly, it was at one time thought that a major consumer of national estimates would be the Policy Planning Staff of the Department of State, performing in the role that was originally contemplated for it, and not in the operational role it has often subsequently assumed. From this perspective, it is not enough to say that estimates are

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frequently deemed irrelevant to policy requirements. Perhaps the difficulty is with the way policy has been formulated, and with the atrophy of the functions and institutions that estimates were supposed to serve.

The other circumstance is that the reception given estimates is very much affected by the attitudes which develop among those who receive and use them. These attitudes tend to be set at the top. Thus, if intelligence is welcomed and read at the top, and taken seriously there, it will be read and taken seriously throughout the government. The reverse is also true. It became clear, beginning in 1969, and perhaps earlier, that intelligence in general and estimates in particular were not held in high esteem at the top, and in a degree quite out of proportion to what seemed justifiable. There was deep suspicion and distrust, not only of the estimates, but of those who produced them. This attitude was bound to permeate much of the executive branch, and it did, and the production and use of estimates has yet to recover from its effect.

The Market for Estimates

The comments of our respondents on the quality and value of estimates laid the basis for another category of questions. These concerned the nature of the market for estimates. Was there a continuing requirement for national estimates? If

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so, for what kind? Was their main value in their analysis, in their judgments about the unknown future, or in something else? Where was the market? Should estimates be written for policy makers at the very top, or for some other audience?

On the broad question, the users' view was that national estimates do have a role to play in the policy-making process. This was true even of those who had been most critical of the past product; their problem was not with the legitimacy or usefulness of the estimative function, but with the way they considered it to have been carried out. Our respondents believed, to be sure, that policy makers would rely heavily on their own judgment, and on the judgment of trusted aides. But they also saw a place for estimative products which do certain categories of things.

Before getting into what these things are, a brief digression is in order. As some respondents suggested, the requirement for estimates is probably greatest when a new Administration takes office and for a period of time thereafter. A new group of top policy makers needs to inform itself, and to familiarize itself with the issues. Old concepts and policies must be re-examined and new ones formulated and tested. Once the new team has absorbed the larger picture, and established the main lines of policy, the requirement lessens. At the extreme, as one respondent put it, estimates are not missed when things are set and there are no changes in direction.

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What Should Estimates Do? As to what estimates should strive to do, the responses depended, to a certain extent, on the kind of estimate involved. The role of estimates in sorting out the facts, for example, was more highly valued on military or technical subjects than on matters of internal politics or foreign policy. This reflected in part the greater detail and complexity of the issues, and in part the lesser confidence of users in their own ability to do the job.

The responses covered a fairly wide range, but they again tended to cluster around recurring themes. One was that estimates should help to identify policy problems, and to pose issues and questions about them. "Identify" is the key word. That is, estimates were deemed useful if they surfaced problems which had not occurred to the reader, or were not currently in the forefront of his attention, and if they helped him to understand what their policy impact might be. An example would be a paper which foresaw basic changes in the Sino-Soviet relationship, with a consequent impact on U.S. relations with both countries.

Estimates were also valued when they could sort out the facts and issues in a highly complicated situation. Here the key word is "complicated." What our respondents meant was that in some cases, the facts are so elusive, so apparently contradictory, or so fast changing, as to be unintelligible to anyone whose principal exposure to them is from reading

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raw traffic or perusing current intelligence publications. In such circumstances, they saw a role for estimative intelligence in sorting out the facts, the issues they raised, and the possible consequences for policy. An example would be a paper written in the early stages of the civil war in Angola, which described the strength and composition of the opposing forces and the state of play in the political arena in that little-known country, before tackling the question of probable future developments and their impact on the U.S.

Another perceived function was that of identifying and evaluating the forces at work in a situation. In essence, this is an aspect of analysis. The interest was in what was driving events--in the causal forces whose continuation or manipulation would affect the final outcome, and in the interplay of those forces. An example would be an examination of the internal political and economic forces which accounted for the position taken by various foreign countries in international monetary negotiations, and an appraisal of how these forces could be manipulated or circumvented to serve U.S. ends.

Closely related, there was also a desire for analysis of trends and their probable outcome. That is, there was a requirement for estimating. The focus was not, however, on specific estimates of specific future happenings. It was rather on how events could be expected to develop as the forces at work played themselves out, and how changes in the

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forces at work would affect the ultimate outcome. An example would be an examination of probable future developments on the Italian political scene and their impact on Italian policy toward NATO, the Common Market and other institutions of interest to the U.S.

Still another perceived function was that of judging the consequences of ongoing developments for U.S. policy. This meant, in effect, supplying the "so what" of that which had come before. It was perceived as the step which converted analysis into a coherent statement of what the interplay of forces and their probable development meant for U.S. interests and U.S. policy. It included the identification of forces and trends which could undermine the premises on which U.S. policy was based. There is no need to cite examples; it would be a rare estimative product which did not contain this dimension, as the above examples suggest.

Finally, estimates were valued when they were able to judge the reactions to U.S. policies or actions, ongoing or contemplated. Here, U.S. policy was taken as given, and the estimative input was not to its formulation, but to a judgment of its effects. In part, our respondents had in mind so-called contingency estimates, which attempt to describe what would happen if the U.S. were to do this or that. An example would be a paper which examined the reactions abroad to a contemplated arms control proposal, and which assessed its prospects.

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Apart from these more or less recurring themes, certain users saw other values in estimates. Worth mentioning here is the interest expressed by some in getting long term analyses which they did not have time to do for themselves. Almost invariably, they had in mind a division of labor, rather than the performance of a function which they thought estimative intelligence particularly well equipped to carry out. Such a requirement has interesting implications, for it views estimates coming from outside the policy process as a mere convenience to a policy maker who is too busy, and not as publications with a special contribution to make.

There were several reasons for the relative lack of interest in specific predictions. Some thought that estimates placed too much emphasis on prediction at the expense of analysis and the development of conceptual frameworks. Others simply placed little value on the prediction of events such as coups, elections or changes of government. Still others valued predictions not for their own sake, but because they forced estimates to move away from the factual and the descriptive and to focus on analysis and the general shape of the future. Overall, there appeared to be considerable skepticism about the capacity of the intelligence community to foresee specific future events, going both to the inherent difficulties and to doubts that it possessed any special qualifications.

Taken as a whole, what is most striking about the comments received is their reaffirmation of the traditional

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function of the national estimate. Emphasized were the same desiderata set forth in the doctrine: a focus on the analysis of forces, trends, and implications for the U.S., in a context that is analytical and forward looking rather than descriptive and current.

For Whom Should Estimates Be Written? The nature of the audience for estimates is a matter of considerable importance. It affects the way they are organized, their level of detail, and how they go about presenting facts, analyses and conclusions.

Some of those we interviewed thought that estimates should be prepared for readers at the very top--the President, members of the NSC, and others at the cabinet level. This was usually not out of confidence that estimates would regularly be read there, but in the belief that estimates aimed at such customers would catch others along the way. There is something to this view, but it misses an important point--that the perspectives and needs of those at the top are not necessarily the perspectives and needs of those who support them.

It is almost certainly too much to expect that busy policy makers at the highest levels will read estimates regularly. Nonetheless, they will be customers under some circumstances. Estimates on particular subjects will from time to time commend themselves, such as those on Soviet strategic objectives and military forces or those making a significant contribution to the conduct of important

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negotiations. So will products of exceptional quality and insight. Particular individuals will value estimates for a variety of reasons--because they come from outside the policy-making establishment, because they inform and illumine on matters of concern, or because they contain agreeable conclusions useful in the policy debate.

The estimates most likely to be read at the highest levels, however, are those which the DCI believes should be read there, and which he urges upon senior policy makers. It is one thing for an estimate to be issued in the name of the DCI. It is quite another for the DCI, as a trusted senior aide of the President, to commend it, and to press it upon others. If the DCI has the necessary access and enjoys the confidence of the President and his chief aides, then any given estimate has a far greater chance of being read at the top, and consequently, throughout the government. "Any given estimate" is the way to put it, because the use of the DCI's position, prestige and access, if it is to be useful and effective, cannot become routine. Nor can it be fully effective unless the DCI involves himself in the process of producing estimates, so that he can sell what is truly his, and help insure that estimates are relevant and of high quality.

The reception afforded estimates at the top will also be affected by the attitudes toward them that exist or develop

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there. We have already suggested that over the past few years, there was a disposition to discount the importance of the estimative function, and a deep skepticism about the value of the product. In this respect, too, the DCI plays a crucial role. His personal qualities, his access, and the confidence that the President has in him can help establish a receptivity for the product, which its own qualities would then have to sustain.

Most of our respondents felt that estimates should be aimed at the Assistant Secretary of State, White House Staff, or comparable level, and we agree. These are the officials who set the terms for the debate on matters of national security policy by formulating the options and alternatives. They are the trusted aides, referred to earlier, who enjoy the confidence of policy makers at the highest levels, and who are turned to for advice. On many problems, they are the highest level which combines expertise with the power to act. Readers such as these are able and knowledgeable. With access to the same material as is available to the intelligence community, they feel able to do their own analysis, and to reach their own conclusions about the shape of the future. They will not accept unsupported judgments, in the form of "we believes" or otherwise.

How Should Estimates Be Written? If estimates are to appeal to this audience and be useful to it, they must be

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prepared with these considerations in mind. As we gleaned it from our interviews, they must:

- emphasize analysis rather than description, and carry the analysis to the edge of the unknown;
- show the relationship among data, analysis and conclusions and the thought processes involved, so that the reader can make his own journey to a different destination if he believes it necessary; this also enhances the credibility of the product and helps to compensate for its "facelessness";
- explain clearly what issues were most contentious at the coordinating table, and why;
- discuss what was discarded and why; this not only helps build confidence in what was retained, but may persuade the reader that his views, if different, might better be discarded;
- state any differences of opinion, and on what they are grounded, and avoid the temptation to consider consensus desirable per se;
- state the implications of the analysis and conclusions for the U.S. and for U.S. policy; and
- describe the continuity or change in the current estimate as compared with its predecessors, particularly the change, and set forth what earlier material is now considered wrong, and why.

One difficulty with this list is that it makes for longer papers, and longer papers tend not to be read. We mentioned this dilemma to a number of those we interviewed, but beyond agreeing that it existed, they had little to offer. It is also true, however, that papers which slight the above

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desiderata will probably not be read either. Thus, the producers of estimates will have to find ways of being complete and persuasive, yet readable and spare. To the extent that length cannot be avoided, quality will compensate for it, among the readers we are now talking about.

At higher levels, the problem is more serious. To provide for the occasions when estimates will be read there, they must contain appropriate syntheses and summaries, with invitations and directions for dipping into detail if such is desired. Summaries are also useful to readers at all levels who for one reason or another do not desire detail in particular cases. The importance of an effective summary cannot be overstated; it was a point made to us, without any prompting, by some of the most senior policy makers with whom we talked. Of this, more is said in the following chapter.

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III

IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS FOR NATIONAL ESTIMATES

The preceding chapter discussed the views held by consumers on the quality and utility of estimates. Some consumers, as well as producers, also had views about specific aspects of the estimative process. In this chapter, those views are discussed in detail, along with perspectives developed by the study team.

Self-Initiated Estimates

Roughly half of all the national estimates presently produced are initiated by the intelligence community itself, and most producers and users with whom we talked seemed satisfied with this fact. A very few felt strongly that work on an estimate should be initiated only at the specific request of a consumer, primarily to avoid the production of irrelevant or unneeded papers. The vast majority, however, believed that intelligence producers have the duty of initiating an estimate when they perceive the development of a significant problem for U.S. policy. We agree, and would add that this appears particularly important at times when the policy making apparatus is preoccupied with some special problem, such as a

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major and prolonged international crisis, or at the beginning of a new Administration.

Two important corollaries should be kept in mind. The first is that the most useful estimates seem to have been produced in response to specific requests by policy makers who really wanted and needed them. Cranking out a lot of self-generated estimates does risk overloading the circuit, thereby diluting user receptivity, and wastes time and money. Also, a self-initiated product typically has a harder time being accepted by busy consumers psychologically unreceptive to thinking about issues ahead of their time, particularly if the product arrives unanticipated. The second corollary, therefore, is that any estimate generated by the intelligence community stands a better chance of being read and used if it is discussed fully from the outset with its intended recipients. Prior to doing this, the producers should focus carefully on their proposed effort to determine whether it will be perceived by users as related to ongoing or potential U.S. policy concerns. If the proposed product appears to have little relationship to such concerns, it is not likely to be worth the effort.

Terms of Reference

On any estimate, there ought to be clear agreement between producer and user on the major questions to be addressed. The

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device for securing this agreement is the "terms of reference" for the estimate.

The production of an estimate generally begins with the elaboration by the NIO or an interagency group of the topics to be explored and the scope of the estimate. Currently, producers take part in the process, and the policy customer may also, either directly or through his agency's intelligence organization. To the degree that producer and user can initially agree on the questions to be answered, and can throughout the production process jointly further refine the scope of the paper, the resulting estimate can be made more relevant to the specific needs and interests of the main recipients.

In general, the more direct the communication between producers and users on the scope of a paper, the better. A formalized, regular procedure providing for ample initial and subsequent consultation between estimators and policy making customers should be instituted. This process should not, however, be allowed to become so formal and bureaucratic as to greatly lengthen the time that it takes to do an estimate, for such delays would themselves detract from the utility of the product.

Encouraging producers and users to discuss the scope of the paper is not to ignore the danger that either might attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to predetermine or

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alter the outcome of the estimate by posing the issues in terms of "loaded" questions. This appears to be a manageable risk, and is likely to be outweighed by the benefits of a close and continuing exchange. The best insurance against bias is probably a careful and continuing review of the process by managers and participants. We found little, if any, concern among producers or users with the possible slanting of estimates as a result of a "cooking" process involving the way the issues are posed.

The need for an estimate having been established and its scope worked out, the producer is next faced with a number of decisions on procedural aspects of the process. These involve such specific questions as how to handle the multidisciplinary aspects of the paper, if any; the use of special methodologies, especially those of a quantitative nature; and whether provision should be made for the presentation of competing views on key issues, all matters on which critics have faulted the producers of estimates. The succeeding pages discuss these matters, along with other more general issues associated with the production process, including the use of net assessments, coordination, and the handling of dissent.

Multidisciplinary Work

There was general agreement among consumers of estimates that the intelligence community has done far too few cross-disciplinary or analytically-integrated studies in recent

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years. None of the dozen or so consumers with whom this specific subject was raised believed that estimates are now adequately interdisciplinary. Several thought that estimates were particularly poor in blending economic with political factors. Two felt that the intelligence community as a whole had done very little interdisciplinary work. One commented that NIE 35/36-1-76, The Middle East Military Balance, 1976-1981, represented a "good try" in the multidisciplinary realm. This estimate attempted to interweave political, economic, and military factors into an appreciation of the relative strengths of various countries in the mid-East.

Producers were less critical. Some maintained that estimates have contained interdisciplinary analysis all along, that consumers can be assured that estimates take account of all the main factors in the situation, even if some were left unstated. Several veteran intelligence officers believed that the ONE staff and Board had, in its heyday, constituted the multidisciplinary group par excellence. Other producers complained that the present product usually simply splices together separate sections of political, economic, or military analysis, leaving the reader to do his own synthesis of the relationships. It is the failure to produce this synthesis that spurs the criticism from the consumers.

Almost everyone critical of the present interdisciplinary effort agreed that, while the community must do better, the

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task will not be easy. There is, for one thing, little agreement yet on how best to accomplish good multidisciplinary synthesis or integration. Moreover, differing bureaucratic priorities and increasing specialization among analysts have, until recently at least, presented real problems in useful interdisciplinary work.⁴ For another, the notion that multidisciplinary analysis is "a good thing" has become perhaps overly fashionable in the intelligence community and outside it, and climbing recklessly on the bandwagon could easily lead to a drop in quality. This would be unfortunate, because the principle is sound and the need to apply it real.

To produce a good interdisciplinary product, analysts and experts working on it must be organized in a way calculated to bring their expertise to bear in a multidisciplinary manner. This probably necessitates placing the analysts in an environment with an effective task or project leader where meaty, wide-ranging discussion can take place prior to actual drafting so as to focus the drafting on the key questions from an interdisciplinary point of view at the outset.

The discussion should be aimed at identifying the key issues and the cross-relationships among them, i.e., it should be a "synthesizing discussion." The objective is to produce

⁴ New organizational arrangements within the Directorate of Intelligence of CIA are intended in part to meet these problems.

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in the drafting itself a narrative designed around the illumination and analysis of the key issues, one that interweaves, according to their significance and interrelationships, political, economic, sociological, military and scientific factors bearing on the issue. It is this subtle, hard to produce synthesis that is the essence of a good interdisciplinary effort.

New Analytical Methodologies

Another question is whether additional analytical leverage can be gained on estimative problems by reaching beyond traditional techniques and utilizing quantitative, mathematical and systems-oriented methodologies.

The alleged failure by producers to use new methodological tools of analysis has been cited by some critics as a serious flaw in the estimative process. Our interviews reflected little support for this charge. No consumer we talked with showed any deep-seated conviction that the intelligence community was seriously remiss on this score. While virtually everyone agreed that the community ought to evaluate new analytical methods as they come along, no one argued that the product would be improved by their wholesale adoption, especially in estimative production, where short deadlines and the need for simplicity and relevance often work against complicated methodologies and presentations.

We found a good deal of skepticism among consumers and producers about using computers and other "new" methodological

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tools in preparing political or general estimates. Most described themselves as "willing to be persuaded," but as one producer put it, a long time is usually required before one can be sure that a new analytical technique will have an intelligence payoff, and this means that inevitably "you chase up some blind alleys." With limited analytical resources this can be an expensive proposition.

Other producers pointed out that using new methodologies entails some risks. A strange new technical vocabulary--a frequent by-product--may well turn off the reader. Over-reliance on new techniques in writing estimates might imply greater precision in judgments than the facts warrant. And not all new analytical techniques--not even those specifically designed for political analysis--can be successfully adapted for estimative use. Many demand more information than analysts have or can get. Many are quantitative, and not all intelligence issues lend themselves to such treatment.

Nevertheless, keeping up with the state of the art in analytical methodologies is an important obligation of all intelligence analysts, and several "new" techniques appear to promise at least limited applicability in estimating.

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two possibilities; there are and will be others. The important thing is to strive to be open-minded and alert to possibilities as well as limitations. At this point, the new analytical methodologies, particularly the more radical and complicated ones, appear more suitable for conducting the basic analytical work supporting the production of estimates than for use in estimates themselves.

Competing Analysis

"...the issue of consensus versus competition in analysis represents a persistent conceptual dilemma for the intelligence community. Policy-makers tend to want one 'answer' to an intelligence question, but at the same time they do not want anything to be hidden from them.....Some members of the intelligence and foreign policy communities today argue that the consensus approach to intelligence production has improperly come to substitute for competing centers of analysis which could deliver more and different interpretations on the critical questions on which only partial data is available."

--Final Report, Senate Select
Committee on Intelligence
Activities, 1976, Book 1, p. 272.

The provision of competing centers of analysis is a concept that is getting considerable attention at present. The objective is to reduce the chances of overlooking or ignoring some vital aspect of an important analytical or estimative matter.

In one sense, the principle is no stranger to the intelligence community. Currently, each separate intelligence component with competence in a particular field finds itself in competition with others to convince the audience that its

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views are correct. Thus, each agency serves in a very real sense as a competing center of analysis. If this were not so, there would be no need for a coordination-dissent procedure in the national estimative process.

Some critics of the process argue, however, that it is not enough to have competition over ideas within and among the intelligence agencies themselves. They charge, in effect, that the intelligence community could become--or has become--a sort of closed corporation in which the free interplay of ideas and theories is no longer possible and important alternative approaches are ignored. They allege that problems of "group think," of reinforcing consensus, and of mind set or bias often prevent the adequate exploration of analytical alternatives and the formulation and presentation of alternative estimates. Critics cite the inability to provide an environment wherein analysts can easily depart, if they like, from the standard view on an issue as a main reason for the failures of intelligence to do such things as predict the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in 1973.

We encountered only limited support for these assertions among consumers. Many of those commenting nevertheless made it clear that they wanted and expected all the informed views they could get, especially on the more important intelligence subjects. Some intelligence components do have a virtual monopoly of expertise on certain economic and scientific or

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technical subjects. This makes for considerably less competitive analysis on these subjects than many consumers--or producers--would like to see.

In the effort to leave no analytical stones unturned, one relatively inexpensive approach is the use of a so-called "devil's advocate." The concept provides that someone be made responsible for building a case opposed to that in a draft estimate, so that two sets of analyses and conclusions can be considered and weighed before the estimate is finally approved. The approach was tried during the production of NIE 11-3/8-75, Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s, and we were told by some familiar with the exercise that it was very useful. Several of those interviewed favored using this process--none was opposed--but said that it should be employed only on the most important estimates. We agree. Clearly, there is a continuing need for efforts of this sort that force estimators to search out and seriously consider information and hypotheses that go against their own theories and views of reality. It would appear important, however, to confine use of the technique to important areas of estimates where there is substantial uncertainty and debate. It should not be used to help construct straw men.

The only experiment involving a large scale effort to provide an alternative analytic approach was the so-called

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"B-Team" exercise, used during the preparation of NIE 11-3/8-76, Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s. The team was put together as a result of the dissatisfaction of certain members of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board with earlier estimates in this same annual series. Producers to whom we spoke before or during the experiment were generally neutral or slightly pessimistic in their views about its usefulness; consumers were guarded in their reactions. The widely publicized charges and counter-charges about the experiment, and the fact that it has been so recently completed, make it difficult at this point to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses or to offer an opinion about its overall value. Perhaps the only comment that can fairly be made now is that the idea of turning loose a fully staffed and funded "competing center of analysis" on an estimative problem is laudable in purpose, but likely to be expensive and difficult in execution. The competing teams must have the same data, the same rigorous analytical procedures, and the same degree of relentless objectivity if the exercise is to work at all. The hue and cry following the "B-Team" experiment suggests just how tricky a proposition this is likely to be.

In all this, the problem is to encourage alternative analysis without artificiality and without a drop in the quality and coherence of the product, in a way that stimulates thinking rather than emotion, and within the constraints of

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available time and resources. Ways must be found for encouraging the development and presentation of alternative views, and the time and means to give them a fair hearing and to incorporate them in the final text as appropriate. We suspect that the basic answer, as with so many other elements that make for success in the business of estimating, lies in the skill, perceptiveness, and intellectual rigor of the estimative manager, which are probably more important to success than any organizational techniques that might be developed. This is not to say, however, that there may not be room for more formal arrangements, if the issue is important enough and if other factors seem to warrant such an approach.

Net Assessments

Although the use of net assessments is not frequently an issue in the production of estimates, it presents philosophically troublesome problems and deserves discussion.

The net assessment function, and the part that intelligence should play in it, are subjects of continuing confusion and controversy. Much of the confusion derives from the lack of a commonly accepted definition of a net assessment. The controversy is largely over where in the national security bureaucracy the function can most efficiently be performed, and with the least risk of having it distorted by policy biases.

In the aspect that raises issues for intelligence, net assessment means pitting on paper, in carefully comparable

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form, the strengths and weaknesses of an adversary power against those of the United States, in order to determine which is the stronger and in what respects. This is usually, though not necessarily, in terms of military forces. In the lingo of war gaming, a closely allied concept, net assessment poses "red" or enemy forces against "blue" or friendly forces. The rub is that those who do the assessing must have complete access to data on U.S. capabilities, present and prospective, as well as data on the capabilities of the adversary. Compiling the former, of course, lies well outside the intelligence community's responsibilities and prerogatives.

Of the producers and users of estimates with whom we discussed net assessments involving the U.S., none felt that the intelligence community should conduct them or include them in national estimates (although one saw the DCI as a possible producer, in some other context). To do so, they reasoned, would be to run an inordinate risk of transforming estimators into advocates or opponents of particular U.S. policies. They recognized that if net assessments are to be done, the intelligence community must furnish data and judgments on the capabilities of the adversary, but felt strongly that this should be the limit of the community's involvement. They believed that the overall responsibility for net assessments involving the U.S. must reside outside the community proper as it does at present. They did not

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appear to rule out the presentation of comparative data on the U.S. and other countries in estimative products, or analyses involving comparisons, so long as the purpose and result was the elucidation of foreign capabilities, and not that of making net judgments.

We find these views compelling. Getting involved on the U.S. side of a net assessment could rob the national estimative apparatus of one of its most important assets: its detachment from policy advocacy and from domestic disputes over the relative merits of proposed new weapons systems. With the U.S. intelligence effort already weakened by developments in recent years, such involvement, apparent or real, could be disastrous. In making comparative analyses, which are quite another thing, estimators must preserve the difficult but important distinction between that which helps the reader to better understand the capabilities of foreign powers, and that which becomes a net assessment in fact if not in name.

Net assessments can involve comparisons between foreign countries only. In such cases, it is not only acceptable for estimates to include them but imperative, if they are to do their job properly. Several consumers told us that they would like to see more such net assessments, and we agree that it would be useful. Their preparation will probably be a growing assignment for the intelligence

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community in the future, as power becomes more diffuse and as more blocs of states and regional complexes develop that have importance for U.S. national security.

Coordination

"...the process of coordinating a paper could be rewarding. The atmosphere becomes uncongenial to special pleading and to the urging of a parochial point of view by a particular agency.....But in addition to knocking down parochial prejudices, the process had a more positive aspect. It was a forum where people from all over town could exchange views, add to the store of community knowledge, and refine and sharpen their assessments of the course of events."

--Sherman Kent, The Law and Custom of the National Intelligence Estimate, 1976, pp. 93-94.

In the last sentence quoted above, Kent was speaking only of coordination. He might just as well have been discussing the value of the whole estimative process from the point of view of the producers. The estimative process, including the drafting phase, is one of the few that requires a group of participants to work their way through an analytic problem, pulling together into a structured, reasoned whole what might otherwise remain as disparate strands of thought, impression, or opinion. In short, it gives the producers a base from which to compare, agree, and disagree. In the highly segmented world of most intelligence production today, with its frequent emphasis on quick reaction, such a result is important, regardless of the success of the product in

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predicting the future or its immediate contribution to the policy process.

That part of the estimative process that brings the experts on one subject together from separate agencies to scrutinize, debate, and revise the text of a draft estimate--the so-called coordination process--is in many ways the most important single step in the entire process. Often, it is also the most frustrating. At its best, the interagency coordination meeting enriches and adds new substantive dimensions and insights to the draft. At its worst, it dissolves into interminable wrangling and stalemate, or even more unhappily, produces sterile language and flabby judgments in the name of consensus --and to get the messy business over with. Most intelligence officers who have participated more than casually in the estimative process will readily recall attending both types of session.

Many users of estimates told us that it mattered little or not at all whether a paper was coordinated; for them, it was what the paper said that counted. If this attitude is prevalent, why bother with coordination at all, given the complexities of the process and the appreciable chance that it will have negative as well as positive effects?

There are good reasons for doing so. The principal reason is that the coordination process goes to the heart of the concept of national intelligence. It allows the DCI, as the nation's chief intelligence officer, to express his views on the issues in a paper which is his and his alone,

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while requiring other participants either to agree with him or to express their disagreements and the reasons for them. Perceived deficiencies in the process ought not to obscure this essential point. What it means, substantively, is that coordination brings to bear the talents of the entire intelligence community, provides a means of getting a variety of views into the paper, makes it more likely that the pertinent issues will be covered, and, at its best, helps to define the issues and to sharpen them. Additionally, the give and take of coordination permit the participants to test their data, their assumptions and their hypotheses. It is thus inconceivable, despite the very real difficulties in producing coordinated assessments, that any top level decision maker could settle for less than a thorough interagency estimate on subjects of national importance.

The pitfalls in the coordination process are nevertheless numerous and important. Coordination can mask the very real and deeply-felt divisions that sometimes exist within the intelligence community on controversial issues. It can fuzz up clearly drawn, analytically sharp conclusions and projections, and cause an important point to be lost. Divergent views may be given short shrift by a "reinforcing consensus," and "submerged in a sea of conventional collective wisdom." Haggling over major or minor issues can delay the completion of a paper well past the time when it would be most useful to its chief recipients.

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Curing these problems is much harder than pointing them out, but a few general suggestions can be offered. One of the most important has to do with the official who serves as chairman of an interagency coordination meeting. Whether the process proves product-enhancing or stultifying largely depends on this individual. To the extent that he or she is tough-minded, independent, and judicious, and is skilled in running a meeting and in separating serious substantive differences from trivial semantic hangups, the process is likely to be a fruitful one.

It should also be borne in mind that a consensus is often not what the user of an estimate is looking for or needs. Consumers at all levels frequently told us that reaching a consensus was a part of the estimative process that ought to be played down. Several took pains to tell us that they were much more interested in seeing the final paper accurately reflect the range of views within the intelligence community on an important point. Some also wanted to get more of a flavor in reading the paper as to how the coordination process went: which issues elicited the most arguments among the interagency representatives, and which theories or lines of reasoning were advanced at the coordination table but discarded, and why?

Another problem that bothered several interviewees was the internal difference of views that occasionally surfaced

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on a subject among different components or officials of the same agency. This causes delays in the coordination process that would probably be reduced if participating agencies were to meet internally to sort themselves out on the issues before each round of interagency meetings took place. CIA, as the agency with prime responsibility for producing national intelligence has a special obligation to do this, but State, Defense and other members of the community should do more of it as well.

Dissent

In the estimative process, coordination and dissent are two sides of the same coin. At their best, they help make an estimate more thoughtful and more useful to the policy maker than the product of a single agency. A well drafted dissent focuses a different view in such a way that the facts, assumptions, and arguments employed are comparable with those for the position being dissented from. More fundamentally, the dissent mechanism is, as Sherman Kent puts it, "the indispensable corollary to the DCI's primacy" in the estimative field. If all estimates had to be negotiated to a compromise totally acceptable to all the participating agencies, the result would be pap; if the DCI were to insist that all agencies accept his views, the intelligence community would quickly disintegrate.

The formal dissent is a device that has been used rather sparingly on most estimative subjects. One detailed review

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of 83 estimates produced between 1951 and 1964 on a single
geographic region found only six formal dissents in the lot.⁵
That dissents have not been used more frequently may be partly
due to an exaggerated notion that policy makers prefer single
"bottom line" judgments. More recently, it has become clearer
that the presentation of conflicting views on controversial
or complex matters is not merely tolerable to the consumer,
but that he actually prefers it. Several of those interviewed
emphasized this preference.

There is, of course, a world of difference between the
value of a dissent taken to reflect an honest substantive
difference with a predominant view and one taken primarily
to support a bureaucratic position. There are many examples
of both in the estimative record, and this seems bound to
continue. But an increasing sophistication in elaborating
dissents has characterized the process in the 1970s. To the
degree that this is continued, it should be increasingly
possible for the user to recognize readily--as many already
do--which dissents need to be taken seriously and which can
be dismissed.

One practice that should be pursued is the incorporation
of dissents directly in the text instead of in footnotes.

⁵
The Arabs and the Estimates, ONE Staff Memorandum 58-65,
4 Nov 65, TS.

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The textual dissent is now frequently used, and most of the consumers who addressed this subject clearly prefer it. They feel that it provides a much better balance among competing ideas, and a better means of comparing them, than is possible if only one view is carried in the text and dissenting views are relegated to footnotes.

Some consumers told us that they would like to see all the elements of the intelligence community holding a particular dissenting view clearly identified with the dissent. They also want to see an elaboration of the rationale behind the dissent. We agree that such refinements would further improve the mechanism of dissent and make estimates more complete and more useful.

Summaries

There was a strong feeling among the consumers interviewed that a good summary is an absolutely essential part of any estimate. Again and again, consumers emphasized that a tightly written summation that manages to convey accurately an estimate's key conclusions in comparatively brief form is the best possible device for ensuring high-level attention to the "message" of an estimate. Many added that lengthy estimates did not bother them per se--indeed, some users said they wanted and needed ample substantiating detail--so long as a crisp, well-written summary led off.

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A very intensive, deliberate effort to draft such a summary needs to be undertaken for each estimate produced. Those responsible for reviewing the final draft of the paper should ensure that the summary is of the highest quality and accurately captures the flavor and tone of the estimate itself. This is, of course, a tall order, but it is difficult to overstress its importance if estimates are to be well-received.

Beyond matters of process affecting the substance of an estimate, the producers of an estimate have decisions to make bearing on the classification of the product, the manner in which it should be presented, and the possible scheduling of a so-called "post-mortem." The question may also arise as to whether an updated version of the product should be produced at periodic intervals. These matters are discussed below.

Classification

Some consumers were strongly of the view that estimates tend to be overclassified and thereby lose some of their potential audience and thus some of their utility. Both working-level users and officials high in the policy-making apparatus said, in effect: the lower the classification, the better. As in the past, highly classified material will have to be treated in estimative products. It seems only sensible, however, to adopt a general rule that highly classified

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material, especially backup detail and supporting rationale, be relegated whenever possible to separate annexes or appendices. In this way, the basic estimate can be held to (or sanitized to) a lower classification, permitting the essentials to get across to a wider audience.

We heard one other suggestion that struck us as useful in this regard: the periodic publication of brief abstracts of all the estimates written during a given period. If held to the Confidential or Secret level, such abstracts could receive wide dissemination, and apprise potential users (many of whom would have the necessary clearances) about documents of possible relevance to them. This could be particularly helpful to users of military/strategic or scientific/technical estimates, most of which require special handling or physical storage in remote vaulted areas. A publication of this sort might also aid in reducing the number of people who automatically get copies of published estimates.

Written and Oral Presentation

"Whatever the format and procedures, important intelligence should be presented in a way that can lead to discussion and questioning before decisions are made, so that the dangers of the policy maker misunderstanding the judgments (especially those expressed as probabilities) and the implications of such intelligence are reduced to a minimum."

--William J. Barnds in the
Report of the Commission on
the Organization of the
Government for the Conduct
of Foreign Policy, June 1975,
Volume 7, p. 32.

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Although few would go so far as to agree with Marshall McLuhan that "the medium is the message," both consumers and producers alike seem strongly of the view that the presentational medium chosen and the skill with which it is used are very important in getting across the message of an estimate. But, as with alternatives elsewhere in the estimative business, no one method of presentation pleases or meets the needs of everyone.

The basic choices now available are essentially two: a printed paper, or a "live" oral briefing. Each has certain rather obvious advantages and limitations. Most consumers--seven of the ten who commented specifically on this point--clearly preferred to get most or all their estimative material in written form. Of the remaining three, one felt that estimative conclusions should be offered in both written and oral form, one felt that oral briefings of estimates should be made available "more often," and one felt that the presentational format didn't matter much. All producers and former producers who commented said that they thought the intelligence community

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Additional possibilities, including closed-circuit TV, video disk, graphic display of text or computer readouts are becoming increasingly feasible. In general, these seem better suited for use among specialists at the working level, than for communicating detailed judgments on complex subjects to top policy makers.

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ought to explore more vigorously the feasibility of providing selected estimative conclusions orally to some consumers.

We agree that the oral mode of communicating estimative material should be investigated, and used more often if there is sufficient consumer demand for it. Certainly, the producer of estimates should make available the services of a briefer as required. But oral briefings do not seem to offer any kind of panacea and, except for unusual circumstances, should supplement rather than replace a written text. Communicating complex, sophisticated judgments and the supporting rationale orally is very impressive when it is done well, but it is difficult and subject to pitfalls, especially as regards nuances and qualifications, and it requires special skills that may not always be available. Even when they are, the intended audience may be too busy to give the briefer the time or attention needed to do an effective job. Our view is that the brunt of any effort to improve presentational formats ought to go into making written estimates as succinct, readable, and responsive to different levels of need as possible. Efforts should also be made to produce, to the degree that resources permit, several versions of key estimates for consumers with need for different levels of detail.

"Post-Mortems"

Over the years, the term "post-mortem" has been used in the intelligence community to describe two quite different

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processes. It may mean the formal qualitative review of an estimate or a series of estimates some time after publication to judge the accuracy of the predictions and the soundness of the analysis. It may also mean the review of an estimate soon after publication to investigate the adequacy of the information on which it was based and to identify the need for future collection or analysis to fill the gaps.

Post-mortems of the latter type were once quite common, but were later abandoned, because they became highly pro-forma and routinized, and failed to accomplish their purpose. The only recent example of which we are aware was conducted on NIE 11-3/8-75, Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s. It was carried out as an experiment by the various departmental representatives who had just completed the estimate in order to identify gaps in intelligence and areas of special concern that required more attention next time around. The participants were pleased with the experiment.

We agree with those holding that the device can be helpful if used sparingly and on estimates of prime importance. We think a post-mortem should be undertaken shortly after an estimate is completed, should involve both producers and consumers, and should be focused on identifying substantive gaps and problem areas rather than on Monday-morning-quarterbacking the estimate's judgments and predictions. The role we see formal post-mortems performing best is that of helping close

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the circle in the intelligence production process. By pointing up substantive weaknesses and missing pieces of the puzzle, the post-mortem could become a valuable tool in helping set realistic priorities and requirements as guides for intelligence collection efforts.

One useful variant would not await the completion of an estimate, but would be carried on concurrently with the drafting as an integral part of the process. There is much to the proposition that the most efficacious time to identify deficiencies in information and analysis, and to initiate corrective action, is at the time the analytical process is concentrated on a substantive matter during the process of drafting.

Post-mortems on the quality of estimates have been relatively rare, particularly in recent years. Most recent post-mortems of this kind have been in response to "intelligence failures." They have encompassed not just estimates, but the entire range of intelligence coverage on a subject, from special memoranda to current intelligence reporting, situation reports and even individual, raw intelligence reports. The post-mortems on the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war and on the Cyprus crisis in 1974 are examples. The producers who commented on post-mortems concerning quality favored them as helpful if they were used only on estimates of major importance and if they included provision for feedback from consumers.

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Post-Publication Update

We encountered almost no support for the notion that estimates ought to be revised and reissued at fixed intervals, except in the case of the annual Soviet strategic estimate, NIE 11-3/8, on which there was substantial user demand for a new version each year. One Department of State country director did express an interest in an annual estimate on his country, even if nothing significant had occurred in the interim. But his country is a "denied area" as far as reporting channels are concerned, and he was the only user who took this position. Our own view is that estimates should be updated, as a rule, only when a significant change in the situation or in the questions to be addressed requires it.

The problem is that there is at present no systematic method for determining whether such changes have occurred. In our view, all estimates should be reviewed periodically to decide whether an update is required. Such a review would involve a sort of post-mortem to determine whether the existing estimate is deficient in scope, analysis or in the pertinence and accuracy of its judgments. Systematic stock-taking would not only help insure that particular estimates remain up-to-date, but might also provide more general insights into past mistakes which can be minimized or avoided in the future.

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IV

ORGANIZATION FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ESTIMATES

The ultimate quality and utility of an estimate depend primarily on the personal skills and insights of those who produce it. But their ability to use these qualities effectively is determined in no small measure by the organizational environment in which they work. The present chapter focuses on certain aspects of that environment.

The question of how the machinery for producing estimates ought to be structured was among the topics most frequently raised in our interviews. Producers, not surprisingly, had stronger views than consumers. While we encountered a wide variety of views, most were variations of two basic proposals: revert to the former ONE system or something like it, or retain and perhaps modify the current NIO system.

Under the NIO system, the estimative process can begin, as it has all along, with a request from a consumer. The appropriate NIO makes a recommendation to the DCI, who approves or disapproves. If he approves, the NIO becomes responsible for the proposed estimate, the choice of NIO depending on the subject matter involved. The NIO can also initiate a proposal, subject to the approval of the DCI, and the DCI himself may do so. The NIO may or may not choose to

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convene a meeting to decide on terms of reference or to receive oral contributions, but almost always does so. Such meetings involve representatives of the agencies and departments of the intelligence community most interested in the completed estimate and best able to contribute to it, and sometimes include policy makers to help assure that the proper questions are addressed.

The NIO selects a drafter (or drafting team) from among the same agencies, in consultation with the parent agency or component, and research and writing get under way. The drafters work under the guidance of the NIO; written contributions may or may not be requested from the participating agencies. The draft, when completed, is circulated to the participating components for review prior to its consideration and coordination at an interagency meeting. This meeting, of representatives of the intelligence chiefs of the participating components, is usually chaired by the NIO, but on occasion he designates someone else. When coordination is completed, the draft is reviewed by the DCI (who may also have involved himself at earlier stages) and considered by the National Foreign Intelligence Board. Once approved by the DCI, with the agreement or disagreement of other NFIB principals shown, the estimate is published and disseminated.

The system in the former Office of National Estimates differed in important respects. Except for three major military estimates (which were drafted by CIA teams), drafts

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were prepared by a small staff of analysts in ONE, who devoted their full time to such work. These drafts were reviewed by the Board of National Estimates, a small group of distinguished generalists responsible to the DCI. The Board provided a collegial review, designed to ensure that the proper questions had been asked and answered, that there were no gaps in the treatment of the subject, and to test and if appropriate to challenge the judgments in the draft. Drafts were then sent for review to the participating agencies. Subsequently, representatives of the chiefs of these agencies met with the Board to comment on the draft and to coordinate it, prior to its submission to the United States Intelligence Board (now NFIB).

There is still another difference in the two systems. The staff and Board of ONE typically spent far less time on liaison with consumers than do most NIOs, who are explicitly charged with making such liaison an important part of their duties. This lesser emphasis was in part to ensure that the separation between intelligence and policy was maintained, a separation regarded at that time as highly important by many in the intelligence community.

The current system gives each individual NIO a larger measure of autonomy and responsibility for the production of estimates than any one individual had under the ONE system. It also encourages and requires a close working relationship between each NIO and the main producers and consumers in his

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particular area. The former results in more structural flexibility and responsiveness than was possible under the ONE system. The latter makes possible better communication between producers and consumers. Both results were highly valued by most of the consumers who commented on the subject. A third major benefit, in the eyes of some producers, is that the NIO system puts the drafting responsibility on analysts who deal with a subject on a day-to-day basis, and who, theoretically at least, have the greatest expertise on that subject.

At the same time, many producers and some consumers were quite vocal about what they saw as shortcomings in the NIO system. One frequently heard criticism was that estimates before 1973 were of more uniformly high quality than those produced now. Another was of the ad hoc nature of the drafting process, whereby analysts with little or no experience in drafting estimates are asked to do the job. It was pointed out that the best substantive expert in town is not necessarily able to write a good estimate, and that even if he is, he may be so busy responding to a host of demands on his time that he is unavailable to the NIO or forced to divide his time among different tasks and slight his drafting assignment.

The system, as seen by some, also places an extraordinarily heavy burden on one person--the NIO. This individual must take on almost single-handedly not only the substantive responsibility

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for the accuracy and thoroughness of the estimate but also the managerial and diplomatic chores involved in steering it through the coordination process. At the same time, he must cope with the numerous other responsibilities of his position. There is no collegial review apparatus to spot weak or missing links in the paper, or to challenge the conventional wisdom, as was the case under the ONE system. Finally, a single NIO is probably less able than a group to deflect advocates of particular bureaucratic viewpoints.

Efforts have been made to respond to some of these problems. An Estimates Advisory Panel made up of distinguished individuals from outside the intelligence community has been approved though not yet activated; it would supply an element of review. The recent reorganization of the production offices in CIA's Directorate of Intelligence was undertaken in part to put more analytical strength into the Agency's estimative effort and to make it bureaucratically easier for substantive experts to be freed from competing demands on their time while working on estimates.

We seriously question, however, whether these steps, laudable though they may be, go far enough. If the President, his top advisors in the national security and foreign affairs field and the American public are to be confident that estimates contain the very best intelligence judgments that can be made, further organizational improvements need to be undertaken.

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Internal Collegial Review

A small group of distinguished generalists of proven wisdom and ability, chosen from both within and outside the intelligence community, ought to be reinserted into the estimative process as a collegial review body.

In making this recommendation, we are aware of the sharply contrasting views that have been expressed about the work of the former Board of National Estimates, which performed the collegial review function until it was abolished in 1973. Its detractors charged that the institution was out of touch with the needs of customers and that it encouraged an undue search for consensus at the expense of sharpness in estimative language and judgments. Its defenders maintained that its labors resulted in a more thoughtful and sophisticated product, and that it helped guarantee thoroughness and objectivity of analysis and presentation. At any rate, since the demise of the Board there has been no collegial review of estimates, save the necessarily brief and often cursory one that occurs when the National Foreign Intelligence Board meets to consider a draft.

Arguments over the value of a collegial review of estimates by a body of generalists continue to this day. Most of the consumers whom we interviewed and who commented on the subject clearly supported the concept. Producers were mixed in their reactions. Some of those at or near the

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working level tended almost instinctively to oppose it. As one put it, in extreme terms, "the less review the better; the customers' reaction is the only review we need." There tended to be greater support for the concept among senior intelligence officers, present and past, many of whom felt that collegial review by generalists is a vital part of the process that should not be neglected any longer.

We find the arguments of those favoring collegial review persuasive. Better quality could ensue from the review of a draft by a group of thoughtful, analytically incisive individuals who are sharp enough to catch faulty logic, wishful thinking, and inconsistencies. More thoroughness could result from the examination of a draft estimate by a group of generalists, each bringing to bear his own approach and knowledge, so that the draft is considered from a variety of angles. Greater objectivity could be attained because a group independent of any bureaucratic loyalties would be better able than a single individual to fend off pressures to alter judgments or avoid hard calls. Also, generalists can call attention to some important element in a situation that the experts are apt to take for granted and say nothing about, or to facets of a subject that they might have overlooked.

Members of the collegial review body ought to be drawn from various professions in and out of government, with the widest possible representation from the major academic

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disciplines used in the estimative process. Inclusion of a political economist, a scientist, an economist, a military specialist and a sociologist or anthropologist might be a good start. Members should be appointed by the DCI, and be responsible only to him. To prevent bureaucratic hardening of the arteries, members should ordinarily not serve for more than four or five years. The review body should be a full time operation, and should be close to the DCI both organizationally and physically. Beside examining estimative drafts, the group might generate or discuss ideas for new estimates, review old ones to see if they need to be updated, and perhaps stimulate and comment on thoughtful single agency products inappropriate for national estimative treatment.

Review by Outside Consultants

The Estimates Advisory Panel (EAP) could, if implemented, serve as an adjunct to the collegial review body, and possibly as an eventual source of recruits for it.

As originally conceived, the EAP was to consist of about three dozen carefully selected experts, primarily if not entirely from outside the intelligence community. Members would be invited by NIOs to gather in small sub-panels to review specific estimative projects while they were under way and to provide comments and recommendations.

The use of outside consultants on estimative problems is not new, dating back to the beginnings of national estimates

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in 1950. Those familiar with the history of their use felt, for the most part, that only indifferent success had been achieved overall, but that sometimes the results were useful. Intelligence producers who commented on the EAP were only mildly optimistic. They pointed out that its real value would be directly proportionate to the caliber of the people enlisted, and expressed skepticism that enough able people could spare the time to make the idea work well.

Their caution seems well founded, for the problems in using outside consultants are substantial. A consultant must be willing and able to spend a good deal of time going over the intelligence data on which an estimate is based; this can be a real problem for busy, prominent specialists with their own careers and interests. Another problem is that the consultant may find it difficult to cope with the rather special world in which intelligence producers operate. As one senior official said, "if it is hard for a producer to get into the mind of a policy maker, it will be three times as hard for a consultant to do it."

Nevertheless, the EAP concept seems worth a try. Consultants have performed a useful role in the estimative process in the past, and can do so again. At the least, assuming that top notch people are recruited and used, the EAP could help allay concerns that national estimates are not the result of the best thinking that can be obtained on a subject.

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Changes in Current Practices

There remains the question of what changes should be made in the basic practices now employed for producing national estimates. We recommend two.

The proposal for inserting a collegial review body into the process, as recommended above, could or could not constitute a basic change, depending on the way it is implemented. On the one hand, a collegial review group could serve in an advisory role to the NIOs, with the latter free to accept or reject its advice and recommendations. On the other hand, acting for the DCI, it could have the last word during the production process on matters of scope and content, much as the former Board of National Estimates did. The ultimate responsibility and authority for the scope and content of national estimates would of course be the DCI's, as it has been all along.

In making our recommendation for a review group, we had in mind the latter alternative, for a number of reasons. If the review group were only advisory, it would be no more than a group of internal consultants. We doubt that it could then be justified, particularly as a full time body, and it might have difficulty in acquiring and holding the caliber of people required. Substantively, it would not have the authority to go along with its responsibility for insuring, through a collegial approach, high quality and the thorough and complete treatment of a subject.

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A collegial review group with authority would serve two other purposes. It would be an additional means of insuring the objectivity and disinterestedness of national estimates, qualities that should be among their prime contributions to the policy-making process. This contribution is an important one, for the comparative advantage of intelligence officers vis-a-vis their policy making counterparts lies not in their being more able, better informed, or better intentioned, but in the vantage point from which they do their work and in their separation from the policy process. Second, a review body with authority over substance would serve as an additional means of both highlighting and exercising the primacy of the DCI in the production of national estimative intelligence.

We urge a second basic change in current procedures, which we consider to be as important as the first. That is the establishment of a small staff of analysts who would be charged with the initial drafting of estimates. It would have no other duties. The staff, like the collegial review group, would be an instrumentality of the DCI. Care should be taken to insure both the substance and appearance of this relationship, and the separateness of the staff from the constituent elements of the intelligence community, for the reasons already suggested in the preceding paragraph.

There are good reasons for having a full time staff to draft estimates. The drafting of estimates requires particular

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skills, which are not easily found or developed. Native ability and substantive expertise do not guarantee them, for they involve the crafting of a distinctive art form--the national estimate--and the development of perspectives and approaches suitable for it. Experience strongly suggests that these skills are best developed through specialization and experience, i.e., by the repeated exposure of an individual to the actual task of drafting. The present method of drafting has created some problems, as mentioned earlier, and almost certainly accounts for much of the "unevenness" in the product frequently mentioned to us.

We recognize that it is untidy to make the above two suggestions for change in the present system of producing estimates, and to go no further. It seemed better, however, to confine ourselves to a discussion of principles, rather than to try to set forth a detailed blueprint of what the estimative machinery might look like after the changes were made. In the same vein, we make an additional recommendation. According to the comments of those we interviewed, and by our own reckoning, the NIOs have made a most valuable contribution in carrying out their explicit responsibility for maintaining contact with the principal users of estimates. This has helped to make estimates more relevant and responsive to their needs. We urge that provision for this kind of dialogue be maintained.

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V

THE USER'S ROLE IN ESTIMATES

This study has stressed that if estimates are to be relevant and useful, producers must have a good understanding of the needs of users. Common sense suggests that such understanding can best be acquired if producers and users are reasonably closely linked, at least to the extent of communicating directly on matters of scope, timing and the issues to be addressed in an estimate. On this basic precept there is no real dispute, but there are differences of opinion on how to define "reasonably closely" and on whether the benefits of close association outweigh the risks.

A number of policy makers saw little need for any additional effort to provide guidance to the producers of estimative intelligence. Some thought that if an intelligence producer were competent and well informed, he could determine on his own what users needed and wanted. Most policy makers, however, considered that efforts to improve communication were necessary and desirable. Generally, they felt that the NIOs had done much to bridge the gap between policy officers and the producers of intelligence, but that much remains to be done.

If there is to be an effective dialogue between the producers and users of estimates, it would seem necessary

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that certain conditions be met. The most important, noted before in this study, is clear evidence of interest on the part of the President and other senior policy officials in the utilization of estimative intelligence as part of the policy-making process. The President in particular, as the chief "user" of intelligence, sets the tone. Second, senior officials on both the intelligence and policy side must actively foster the dialogue and devote part of their time to producer-user relationships; the key individuals are the DCI and the President's National Security Advisor. To date, these conditions have been satisfied only partially and sporadically.

In November, 1971, the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) was established to provide user "direction and guidance on national intelligence needs," and "evaluation of intelligence products from the viewpoint of the user."⁷ It was made up of senior policy makers, plus the DCI. Largely because of a lack of top-level attention, the NSCIC languished, holding only one substantive meeting during its entire five-year existence. Its second Working Group, established in late 1974, made only a small start in educating users about the products and capabilities of the intelligence community. The NSCIC was criticized for its

⁷ White House press release, November 5, 1971.

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inactivity by both the Murphy Commission and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

By the time the Select Committee submitted its report, the NSCIC had been abolished. Executive Order 11905 of February 18, 1976, requires the DCI to consult with users of intelligence to ensure the "timeliness, relevancy, and quality of the intelligence product" and to "establish such committees of collectors, producers, and users of intelligence to assist in his conduct of his responsibilities as he deems appropriate." In implementation of this order, the DCI charged the National Intelligence Officers with determining consumer needs for intelligence and gave his Deputy for the Intelligence Community the responsibility for the evaluation of intelligence products. At present, there is no formal organization of users to provide guidance to the producers of intelligence. It is probably fair to say that the collection and production of intelligence are governed more by what producers think is needed than by guidance from users.

Close User-Producer Links: Risks and Benefits

There are two basic schools of thought about the proper relationship between intelligence producers and policy makers. The first holds that intelligence analysts ought to maintain a certain remoteness from those involved in decision making "so as to keep intelligence pure and untainted by policy

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pressures," as Hanson Baldwin put it.⁸ The other asserts that close cooperation between intelligence and policy officers is not only permissible but mandatory, if both are to do their jobs properly. Most of the consumers and producers we interviewed held the latter view. They felt that the risks of a close relationship, although not to be taken lightly, are nevertheless tolerable in view of the potential benefits to both sides.

The chief concern of those who worry most about the risks is that a close association will in time make the estimators too sensitive to the user's interests and attitudes. As one former senior intelligence officer put it, there is a distinct danger that the producer will get so wrapped up in day-to-day support of the policy maker that he will become, consciously or unconsciously, a member of the policy team. By so doing, he risks losing his objectivity and his ability to step back, take the longer view, and go beyond the operational considerations of the moment to product a paper that provides longer range perspectives and perhaps challenges the postulates on which policy is based. For their part, policy makers can legitimately be concerned that intelligence producers will intrude into their territory if the relationship

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Hanson Baldwin, "The Future of Intelligence," Strategic Review, Summer, 1976.

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with them becomes quite close--though no policy makers that we talked to complained of this having happened.

The primary benefit of a close working relationship, as we and our respondents see it, is a clearer, more realistic appreciation by each side of the capabilities, limitations and needs of the other. The producer of intelligence would have less need to guess about what is wanted by the users of his products. He could acquire a better appreciation of the problems preoccupying the policy maker, and what issues are paramount in his thinking. As one of our respondents put it, it is necessary for the producer of estimative intelligence to get inside the mind of the user; this cannot be done without close and continuing association. Such association would facilitate the production of papers which are relevant to the needs of the policy maker, and responsive to them.

For their part, many policy makers have an imperfect view of what the intelligence business is all about. More particularly, they are unaware of what estimates can and cannot be expected to do for them, and of the difficulties that are sometimes involved in zeroing in from a distance on matters of interest to them. There also appears to be an insufficient understanding of the process of producing estimates and of the nature of the product that results, with the consequence that an estimate is viewed by some as no different from any other intelligence product. Perceived deficiencies

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in the product have contributed to this viewpoint. So has the failure to understand that a national estimate is the voice of the DCI, that coordination has many positive benefits, and that the vantage point of the intelligence estimator permits him to make a distinct, if not unique, contribution.

Providing for Closer Contacts

We found a general feeling among both users and producers that providing for the right kind of communication between them will not be easy. One very obvious constraint on both sides, but especially on policy makers, is a lack of time. Policy people who admit to neglecting their relations with intelligence producers complain that there simply is not enough time in their operational and crisis-oriented schedules to fit in regular meetings with intelligence analysts, no matter how desirable this might be. Additionally, the fact that users and producers are physically located up to an hour apart is a strong deterrent to impromptu meetings when time is available.

A solution sometimes suggested for bringing intelligence and policy people together more regularly is the creation of an organization like the NSCIC, but without that group's liabilities. Among the few producers and users who commented there was skepticism, however, about the efficacy of a new attempt to provide a formal, institutional solution. Such skepticism is understandable in the light of experience. Unless vigorous and continuing leadership is exerted from

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the top, a new organization might soon atrophy. As the pressures of more immediate operational concerns grew, top-echelon members of the group would be increasingly tempted to designate lower ranking officers to attend meetings. This would reduce the organization's power to make decisions and to provide guidance.

This alone is not reason enough to shy away from a new effort to establish such a group, and in fact such an effort ought to be made. Even a lively second or third echelon users' organization would provide a forum for airing the concerns and needs of policy makers. It would be wise, however, not to expect too much of such a group, given the problems and pressures described above.

Among the subjects it might tackle are the following.

On estimates:

- topics for national intelligence estimates;
- terms of reference;
- priorities;
- the evaluation of published estimates; and,
- the role of estimates in support of "operational" requirements and in crisis situations.

More generally:

- intelligence research programs;
- significant gaps in intelligence coverage;
- the allocation of intelligence resources as it affects the final product;

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- conflicting demands on intelligence;
- imbalances in the intelligence effort; and,
- the broad capabilities, limitations and problems of intelligence collection, analysis and production, as they affect the ability of intelligence to support policy makers.

Even if a formal group is established, it seems evident that the improvement of communication between policy officers and intelligence officers will depend mostly, as it has all along, on the initiatives taken by individuals to get to know one another better. Furthermore, it is clear that most of the burden will be on the producers of intelligence. As one quite senior State Department official put it: "the policy maker does not communicate with intelligence--you know that. The intelligence officer has to anticipate and do everthing. The policy man will not tell him enough, early enough." Another senior customer said that he found it difficult to provide advance guidance, and that intelligence should not look for it. He added that the intelligence producer should instead derive guidance from a greater interaction with users, so that he could identify independently what was needed.

Certain related themes emerged from our interviews. Several policy makers stressed the importance of the personal relationship between producers and users. That is, only if there were relations of mutual confidence would a policy maker be prepared to express his innermost thoughts

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or to welcome periodic get-togethers at which perceptions could be compared. There were also suggestions that the intelligence community do market research, in a rather formal way. As one senior policy maker put it, intelligence has to find ways of getting its message across, and this is a marketing problem.

Within the framework of an expanded dialogue, each side needs to work harder on certain aspects of the relationship. The user, busy though he is, should do all he can to ensure that the intelligence producer is aware of trends in policy that may create new requirements for estimates. He also ought to strive to find out more about what intelligence can, and cannot, do for him. This would involve a far better understanding than many policy makers now have of just how the intelligence community functions.

Producers have a responsibility for seeing that policy makers acquire such an understanding. The main users of estimates are busy people. Moreover, there is fairly rapid turnover in many of the key positions in the national security and foreign policy field. Under these circumstances, the intelligence community has probably been remiss in not having developed a program for acquainting its customers with the capabilities and limitations of estimative intelligence. When this is done now, it is on an ad hoc basis, with little consistency or continuity. As simple a thing as the production

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of a package of sophisticated briefing material would probably help, especially if it were delivered personally by an intelligence officer with whom the user had or was developing a working relationship.

Producers also owe it to themselves, and to the ultimate utility of their product, to work harder than many now do to absorb what is readily knowable about current policies and the preoccupations of policy makers. An alert intelligence officer can acquire a substantial understanding of at least the thrust and direction of U.S. policy in his area simply by keeping his eyes and ears open. Several producers admitted as much, and ventured that this was often enough to permit them to do their jobs. And, of course, it is the duty of the producer of estimates not only to tell the consumer what he wants to know, but also what the producer thinks the consumer ought to know.

This gives rise to two other thoughts on this subject. The first is that those charged with producing estimates can learn much about the concerns of policy makers, particularly those at the Department of State, from their colleagues in the Directorate of Operations (DDO). Officers of the DDO maintain continuing contact with their opposite numbers at the Department [REDACTED].

Also, DDO division chiefs meet regularly with the Assistant Secretaries for their areas. At a minimum, the results of

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such meetings ought to be passed on to the producers of estimates; it would be even better if the latter were invited to participate as appropriate.

Second, one of the best ways for intelligence producers to get to know the needs and concerns of users is to work in or close to a policy position for a time. We found that the most perceptive and pertinent comments on user-producer relations during our interviews came from the relatively few individuals who served in both types of position. But such cross-fertilization should be practiced carefully to avoid conflicts of interest and the blurring of the lines of separation that both users and producers believe it essential to maintain. There are also serious impediments to assigning policy officers temporarily to intelligence roles. For carefully selected intelligence officers, however, a stint in a policy office could be highly useful as a device to foster better mutual understanding.

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VI
THE FUTURE ROLE OF ESTIMATES

What we have heard and read during the course of this study convinces us that national intelligence estimates will have a useful role to play in the policy-making process for the foreseeable future. Whether they actually play such a role will be largely up to the intelligence community itself. Far from having outlived their usefulness, estimates would seem to be more urgently required than ever. There is good reason to think this is true, to one degree or another, of most kinds of finished intelligence.⁹ But because estimates alone attempt to discern what lies ahead, they surely should get high priority in terms of our total intelligence effort.

Other reasons for their potential importance are not hard to adduce. The world with which intelligence and policy must deal is still changing with breathtaking speed. Relations between and among nations and people are becoming more and more complex. As they do, it is getting steadily more difficult for the policy maker, pressed by a great many more immediate concerns, to find the time to take the long view.

⁹ See The Future Market for Finished Intelligence, (S) a CSI study issued in August 1976, for a more detailed look at finished intelligence needs in the years to come.

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Nor can he usually afford to sort out for himself the many interacting factors that will affect the prospective behavior of a foreign entity. And unless he is directly involved in such matters, he will rarely be able to stay abreast of new and impending scientific or technological changes that may impact upon his responsibilities.

This is where intelligence comes in--or should, because these are the sorts of things that useful estimates come to grips with for their readers. Estimates have done this well at times and poorly at others, but will need to be much more effective and consistent from now on. The task will not be easy. For one thing, the growing complexity and inter-relatedness of the world's military, technological, economic, political, and social affairs will make it much more difficult to be clear and precise, or to phrase estimative judgments in simple declarative sentences. More and more tangible and intangible factors will have to be considered before reasonable conclusions can be formed. This will make it increasingly important to weigh carefully all the alternative views on crucial issues and to articulate them clearly. It also means that the underlying data base is likely to become larger, or clouded by conflicting information. Yet to ignore or pass lightly over parts of the data would be risky.

For another, it is likely that the resources of the intelligence community, like those of the nation as a whole,

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will continue to be stretched to accommodate other urgent needs. This may well mean that estimates will have to be produced more economically, in a shorter time span, and for a wider audience. Eventually this seems bound to entail producing fewer estimates. Producers and users will no longer be able to enjoy the luxury of trying to know everything about everybody, but will have to concentrate on those countries and problems that affect our security the most. This means a greater willingness to say "no" to requests for estimates on less essential matters.

"Quality" should become the watchword, because the need for estimative excellence will continue to grow as U.S. power and self-sufficiency become more circumscribed. Our national well-being will depend more heavily on knowing accurately what our adversaries and allies may be up to. This does not necessarily mean refining the ability to predict specific events. It will, rather, mean being close to the mark in forecasting trends, measuring capabilities of important foes and friends, and assessing their intentions.

Even when quality must be cut back, the plate will remain full. Surely there will be no scarcity of important estimative issues ahead, including some that are critical and a few that are explosive. Unforeseeable crises will occur and troublesome developments are bound to arise. Many topics of present concern will remain and become even more difficult to handle.

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Assuming that well thought-out, relevant estimates are produced, there need be few worries about a market. The most important customers will continue to be the President and his chief national security advisors. To the degree that these leaders find estimates useful, and to the extent that estimates have an established place, formal or informal, in the policy-making structure, their market will be assured. The frequent turnover of military and political decision makers at intermediate and lower levels is a further guarantee that a potential audience for estimates will always exist. The DCI, however, will continue to be the key person in getting estimates read and taken seriously. If the DCI is convinced that estimates are as good as they can be and tries to convince others, estimates should have few problems in reaching the right people.

And the "right people" may well turn out to include a much larger number in the future than it has up to now. Congressional interest in the conduct of foreign and national security policy and the new emphasis on performing governmental functions as openly as possible suggest that estimates will increasingly need to be made available to the Congress, and perhaps even to the public in some form. To do so will require a good deal of careful work in the area of determining what must remain classified in order to protect intelligence sources and methods and to avoid damaging our relations with friendly governments.

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In conclusion: their place in the policy-making process may remain modest and their ability to provide satisfactory answers about the shape of the future will be limited, but for all that, national intelligence estimates will be needed more than ever. There should be a sustained effort to do them as well as possible.

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APPENDIX A: STUDY METHODOLOGY

Much of the commentary and information contained in this study was derived from 66 oral interviews with 97 individuals, many of whom have had extensive experience or direct acquaintance with national intelligence estimates. Many, although not all, of the suggestions offered in the study stem directly or indirectly from their views of what needs to be done to improve the product and the process.

Interviewees were contacted by members of the study team principally because we knew them, or knew of them, and believed they would have some useful views on the subjects included in the study. Inevitably, we contacted many more individuals than were actually interviewed. Some meetings we ardently hoped to arrange simply proved impossible from the start, or had to be scrubbed at the last minute, because of the press of other obligations on some very busy people. In no sense, then, can this be considered a "scientifically" constructed interview base. We did try very hard, however, to cover the whole spectrum of officials involved with estimates both on the consumer and on the producer sides. We also tried to avoid giving undue weight or attention to the views of any one element or sector.

It proved impossible to cover the entire range of issues addressed in this study with any one individual.

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While most of the people we talked with gave generously of their time, inevitably there was not enough opportunity with many of them to cover more than several of the many broad questions we wanted to take up. It did help that three and at times all four members of the study team attended the interviews, thereby enabling us to cover more ground and compare impressions afterwards of what was said and meant. Careful notes were taken.

Consumers

We talked with 46 individuals whom we could classify as current users, to one degree or another, of estimative products, and we interviewed seven prominent former consumers, whose reflections on estimates as they viewed them from some very senior positions promised to provide an additional dimension to the study.

Of the current consumers, seven were National Security Council staff members or their deputies. We spoke with 21 consumers in the Department of State, including one Under-secretary, the Counselor, 11 officers at the Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary level, six at the level of country director, deputy country director, or desk officer, and two officers of the Policy Planning Staff. At the Pentagon we interviewed 12 consumers, including eight in the International Security Affairs office ranging from the Deputy Assistant Secretary level on down, two in the

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Office of the Secretary of Defense, and two general officers on the staff of the Joint Chiefs. We also talked with four officials in the economic policy realm--three in the Department of the Treasury, and the Special Representative for International Trade Negotiations. We interviewed one officer of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Executive Secretary of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

The former consumers whom we interviewed once held the following posts: Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense (two individuals), Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and Executive Secretary of the National Security Council. All had insightful and valuable comments and suggestions to offer.

Producers

We interviewed 39 individuals whom we classified as intelligence producers with current responsibilities relating to some aspect of the estimative production process. We also talked with five former members of the Board of National Estimates who are now retired.

Current producers whom we talked to in considerable detail included ten National Intelligence Officers or their deputies. Non-CIA intelligence producers we saw included

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the Director and the Deputy Director (for Estimates) of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Director and Deputy Director of the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

We interviewed or held seminars with 26 officers of CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, including the Deputy Director for Intelligence, five analysts and managers from the former Office of Current Intelligence, six from the former Office of Political Research, six from the Office of Strategic Research, six from the Office of Economic Research, and one each from the Office of Scientific Intelligence and the Office of Weapons Intelligence.

Use of Estimates and Other Writings

From the outset, it proved difficult to develop a workable plan for using national intelligence estimates themselves in the study. Because the existing body of estimative literature includes so many different kinds of products published on such a wide variety of subjects over the past 27 years, the problem of choosing a representative sample to dissect and comment upon would have been formidable enough by itself. Assuming that such a sample could have been assembled, the study team would have been severely limited in its ability to comment substantively on all but the relatively small number dealing with topics on which team members had some degree of personal expertise. Exploring in detail the processes by which all

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but the most recent estimates have been produced would have been almost as difficult; few records are available, and personal recollections of participants usually fade rapidly and become untrustworthy.

We also derived relatively little help from earlier studies and commentaries on the estimative record per se. No comprehensive look at estimates as a whole has ever been undertaken, and only a handful of post-mortems or validity studies on series of estimates have been done, although those that were written were consulted and proved useful. Reading those studies helped to reaffirm to us the wisdom of avoiding comment on the accuracy of specific estimates. This is devilishly hard to do with any real measure of validity. Many estimative judgments are conditional, i.e., their accuracy hinges on something else happening that may or may not occur. Others will prove "wrong" simply because the United States or some third country will have taken steps that altered the situation that obtained when the judgments were made. Of those that can more readily be identified years later as "right" or "wrong" calls, some will have been of major and some of minor importance, and it would be difficult to weigh them accurately now. Finally, to be able to conclude whether a past estimate was either on or off the mark, one would have to know his history well, or do a lot of research to find out what really did happen.

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For these reasons, we decided to limit our use of the texts of estimates to the study of some of those issued over the past year or two and to the identification of specific problems or issues concerning them by seeking comments and feedback from users. In the event, most of the comments we gleaned were too general or fragmentary to give us more than a few leads for further investigation.

A fairly extensive although fragmentary body of literature about estimates and their role in the policy-making process does exist and was used. Especially helpful were the more than three dozen articles on various aspects of the estimative business that have been included in the quarterly publication, Studies in Intelligence, since 1957. The reports of the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (the Murphy Commission) and of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence were very useful. Various internal CIA memoranda, histories, and reports on estimates also proved helpful, as did selected portions of books, magazine articles, and other open literature concerning estimates and their role in the policy-making process. Most of our data, however, came from the people we interviewed.

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APPENDIX B: SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

- I. Material in the following unclassified publications that were among those used by members of the study team appeared especially relevant to issues discussed in the study.

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II. The following classified reports, memoranda, articles, and studies were found to be especially pertinent to some of the issues taken up in this study.

A. Articles in Studies in Intelligence (all issues classified Secret).

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B. Miscellaneous Official Studies, Memoranda, and Reports

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